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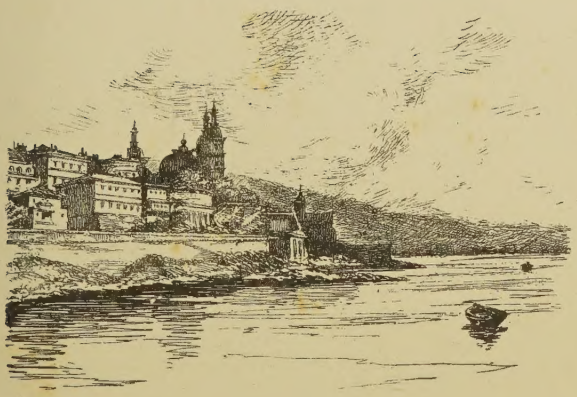

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BY

ALFRED AUSTIN

WITH 16 FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR

BY

GEORGE S. ELGOOD, R.I.

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'AND OUT OF A VALLEY OF GRAPE AND GRAIN THERE BLOSSOMS A CITY OF DOMES AND TOWERS'

LAMIA'S WINTER-QUARTERS

BY

ALFRED AUSTIN

AUTHOR OF 'THE GARDEN THAT I LOVE,' 'IN VERONICA'S GARDEN' 'HAUNTS OF ANCIENT PEACE,' AND 'THE POET'S DIARY'

LONDON
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1907

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Introduction

TO

THE EDITION ILLUSTRATED BY
GEORGE S. ELGOOD, R.I.

'I OBSERVE,' said Lamia, 'that another of those somewhat numerous prose performances of yours, that are more or less remotely connected with Gardens, and which you were pleased, without any previous consultation with me, to entitle *Lamia's Winter-Quarters*, is, like the first of the series, *The Garden That I Love*, to be issued in an equally luxurious form, and to be illustrated by the attractive talent of Mr. Elgood. But since this project, to which my attention was called by that now universal source of information, advertise-

ments, has been alluded to, do you mind telling me why you called our delightful sojourn in a Tuscan villa overlooking Florence my winter-quarters rather than the Poet's winter-quarters, or Veronica's, or, for that matter, even yours?'

Somewhat embarrassed, I replied:

'To have called the book my winter-quarters would have savoured of egotism, and would, moreover, I fear, have failed in attractiveness.'

'But against Veronica's name, or the Poet's, no such objection would lie?'

'Perhaps not,' I said. 'But possibly from living with them, to say nothing of you, I have acquired a habit of respect for the fact; and it was more consonant with truth to call the winter-quarters yours.'

'How is that?' she asked.

'Well, you see, Veronica does what the Poet wishes, and the Poet does what you wish, and so——'

'I beg to say,' she interrupted, '*that* is not the fact. *I* do what the *Poet* wishes.'

'Is not that much the same thing?' I replied. 'You always seem to have the same wish about everything. So I suppose you felt precisely as he did when he wrote those adulatory

lines which I saw in the public prints, a few days ago, under the heading, "A Poetical Impromptu."'

'Really! He wrote no such, nor indeed any, lines, never having seen nor heard of the lady in question, in his life.'

'Is it possible?'

'Everything of that kind is possible in these days.'

'But did he not contradict it?'

'Did he contradict! Like a good many other men, he would have to keep a Secretary for no other purpose than to contradict what is reported in the papers, and most of which they probably never see. I should think he turned the opportunity to better account by recalling a couplet of Pope—

> 'Let Dennis charge all Grub Street on my quill,
> I wished the man a dinner, and sate still.'

'But,' I said, 'are not such inventions calculated to injure the influence of the prints that resort to them?'

'I should think so,' she said, honouring me for once by talking seriously. 'But whose, and what, influence is not being injured just now by their own misdoings? The House of Commons,

for instance, though more written and talked about than ever, has long been losing influence, and the Press is now following suit ; and it is the silent, or comparatively silent, persons and forces that are acquiring or increasing influence ; the Monarchy, the House of Lords, and——'

'The House of Lords!' I exclaimed. 'I thought it was going to be abolished, or to have its very moderate claims yet further curtailed.'

'Did you?' she answered. 'Then your thoughts are not of much value. I daresay it would be difficult to persuade Politicians that Shakespeare was wiser than all the sons of the Mother of Parliaments put together ; and what does he say ?

> 'Take but degree away, untune that string,
> And mark what discord follows.

And so long as the British nation continues on the whole to be sane, it will never consent to take "degree" away, in order to fasten on itself a dead level and a tyrannical uniformity.'

I was so flattered by Lamia having, in a short space of time, condescended to talk seriously with me, that I thought a favourable opportunity had arisen for preferring any request that

I wanted her to grant. Encouraged by this feeling, I ventured to say :

'A great adornment and advantage to the forthcoming volume would be a portrait of the person whose name is associated with it ; in other words, a portrait of Lamia.'

'So it has come to that!' she replied. 'Not satisfied with having travestied me in let me see—yes, one, two, three, four, five successive volumes, *The Garden That I Love*, *In Veronica's Garden*, *Lamia's Winter-Quarters*, *Haunts of Ancient Peace*, and *The Poet's Diary*, you now propose to vulgarise my ideal loveliness and magnetic personality in order to gratify the curiosity of a number of persons who have never seen me, and never will. Let me never hear of such a proposal again. As the little boy said, "Myself is my own"; and, if it please you, part of

> '. . . the gleam,
> The light that never was on sea or land,
> The consecration, and the Poet's dream.'

'Your wish is my law,' I hastened to say, and was about to snatch at the first subject I could think of to ward off further reproof, when she held out a little posy of Penzance sweet-briar roses she had been wearing, saying in her sweetest

manner, as though afraid she might have wounded me, 'Are they not lovely? No, keep them, if you care to do so. They remind me of something I saw the other day, when, on my way to London for a few hours, the train halted between Waterloo Station and Charing Cross at a point overlooking a number of back plots and alleys of the humblest description; and the one immediately below me arrested my gaze. There were two short rows of the purest white linen, lately out of the wash-tub, hanging out to dry; and under them, a hammock, with a chubby baby in it, fast asleep. A few feet behind was a red-brick wall, and along its foot three rows of pelargoniums in full flower, and evidently most carefully hoed and watered. A comely looking woman, with her sleeves tucked up as far as they would go, came out of the house, peeped into the hammock, kissed, or rather hugged the baby, and then turned it round to screen it a little from the direct rays of the sun that were shining on this little paradise. Then the train moved on; and I thought to myself, with a feeling of quiet joy, that neither the garden that we love, nor the Tuscan garden that was our winter-quarters, nor all the gardens and palaces in the world, contain more happiness

than those few yards of ground in one of the humblest parts of London, tenanted by linen hung out to dry, three rows of pelargoniums, a hammock with a sleeping child in it, and a loving mother.'

'I wish I had seen it,' I said.

'I described it to the Poet,' Lamia replied; 'and he then did indulge in an Impromptu, which—let me think a moment—yes—ran somewhat like this:

'How blest are they who hunger not
For riches or renown,
And keep, within a narrow plot,
A country heart in town;

'Who envy not, though lowly born,
Luxurious lives above,
But blend with toil, renewed each morn,
The bliss of blameless Love.'

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BY GEORGE S. ELGOOD, R.I.

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The head and tailpieces throughout the volume are from pen and ink drawings by William Scott.

INVOCATION

I

WHERE Apennine slopes unto Tuscan plain,
And breaks into dimples, and laughs to flowers,
To see where the terrors of Winter wane,
And out of a valley of grape and grain
There blossoms a City of domes and towers,

II

Teuton, Lombard, and grasping Gaul,
Prince and Pontiff, have forced their way,
Have forded the river, and scaled the wall,
And made in its palaces stye and stall,
Where spears might glisten and war-steeds neigh.

III

But ever since Florence was fair and young,
And the sun upon turret and belfry shone,

Were her windows bannered and joy-bells rung,
When back to his saddle the Stranger sprung,
And lances were lifted and pikemen gone.

IV

Yes, ever and ever till you, my Queen,
Came over the sea that is all your own,
When the tear on the tip of the vine is seen,
And the fig-tree cressets have flamed to green,
And windflower wakened, and tulip blown.

V

Then roses were showered before your feet,
And her lily-crowned gonfalons waved above,
And children chanted in square and street,
'All hail to the Monarch may free men greet,
Whose sceptre is Peace, and whose Throne is Love.'

VI

And now that each snow-torrent foams and falls,
And the oreoles sing and the skylarks soar,
And the lithe swallow circles her rose-white walls,
Through the clefts of the Apennine Florence calls,
'More welcome than Spring, come back once more!

VII

'Come back, for the cuckoo is on its way,
And the mountains, smiling, await your smile;
And still in my olive-groves bask and stray,
Till the warm-winged waters and winds of May
Shall waft you back to your own loved Isle.'

I Cedri,
Pian di Ripoli, Florence,
Lady-Day, 1898.

LAMIA'S WINTER-QUARTERS

'WHERE is Lamia?'

The inquiry is one not infrequently made; for, while most of us can vanish without being missed, some favoured individuals there are whose disappearance at once excites a sense of loss; and Lamia is one of these. The question, I need scarcely say, was put by Veronica; since the Poet maintains a fine irresponsible attitude respecting others as well as about himself, and, however anxious I may be to keep sight of Lamia, I am hardly so simple as to betray my desire.

But, responding with sincere alacrity to Veronica's question, I protested I had not the faintest notion where she was, but would at once go in search of her.

Veronica's solicitude was, I suspect, prompted by that deep-seated regard for decorous behaviour, which, far from leaving it at home, she had carefully brought abroad as peculiarly applicable to foreign parts and Continental manners. She is well aware that, in the matter of social observances, Lamia is capable of almost any enormity; and her absence from the morning-room of the hotel in the southern seaport where we were making our first halt, inspired her with natural misgiving.

The search, as it turned out, was not a long one. Lamia I found seated under a tall white-flowering magnolia in a leafy garden hard by, where oleanders already well set for bloom, though still far from their flowering season, and trees that for some unknown reason English people call mimosas, but which they should learn to speak of as acacias, and various evergreen shrubs of stately stature, concerning which I should not at present like to be too closely cross-questioned, offered a sufficient protection against the burning December morning sun, while permitting occasional glimpses

of deep-blue sky. Ostensibly, she was having a further polish put on her brown leather shoes by a black-eyed, black-haired, tawny-skinned urchin, who entered into her humour with true Southern adaptability, and who would have gone on performing his quite unnecessary office as long as ever the young lady desired. For the moment, I think, she had forgotten all about him, for she had three oranges in her lap,—'One for each of you,' she said,—and was delicately dividing the other for her own delectation. A large spray of Parma violets, fastened to her attractive person, I need scarcely say exactly where they should be, completed her recent purchases.

'Do you mind asking Veronica to come and see me?' she said, 'for I never was so happy in my life.'

I bethought me of the somewhat stern interrogatory, 'Where is Lamia?' and merely observed that Veronica was superintending the final operations of the maid in the matter of repacking, and probably would wish not to be disturbed.

'How strange!' said Lamia, 'and how tastes differ! The smell of canvas covers and leather straps is particularly disagreeable to me; whereas the island of Zante itself could not be more

fragrant than the scent of these violets and oranges, to say nothing of the magnolia flowers overhead, and that delightful son of the sunshine at my feet. And to think that, say thirty-six hours ago, I roused you and the Poet from your slumbers to look upon a snow-white world! I daresay you will think me very capricious, but *this* is the garden that I love.'

'*Les absens ont toujours tort*,' said the Poet, emerging from a shady avenue behind her. At the sound of his voice she rose somewhat hastily, as though a performance quite good enough for me was scarcely consonant with the half-courtly veneration she entertains for him; gave the oranges in her lap and a franc-piece to the smiling young urchin, who thought her more fascinating than ever, and said reproachfully, 'Then why do *you* absent yourself?'

'That was hardly what I meaned,' he replied. 'I was referring rather to the position of inferiority you assign to the garden that we love, because it is now far away from us. But you are quite right, and are going to Italy in the proper spirit. Whatever you see there, admire consumedly, and you cannot be far wrong.'

'Are we not in Italy already?'

'Almost. Its vestibule is Provence.'

. . . . . .

I suppose it is because we are very simple folk, and lead at home a rather primitive life, that we find everything new which most other people find familiar, and so many things attractive that the bulk of the world treat as undeserving of attention. Along that magical coast, where we turned our gaze first to the sea-fringe, then to the hill declivities, then back again to the white-laced bays, and never being able to determine which were the more beautiful, I observe that persons who have travelled many hundreds of miles in order to enjoy the sunshine and glamour of the South, are well content to make this entrancing journey in a railway carriage, pulling down the blinds if the sun be a trifle too hot, and conning their newspaper or turning over the leaves of some conventional novel, in any case. That was not our way of travelling, which was a good deal more leisurely and more old-fashioned. We should have liked to find ourselves behind Veronica's ponies, but our hired vehicle did well enough ; and, while we never asked our cheerfully communicative driver to quicken his pace, we frequently begged him to slacken it, and over and

over again bade him halt altogether. Although, save to Lamia, the road was no new one, we all alike had fresh unsophisticated eyes for it, and all of us found it a veritable wonder-world. Indeed, I could not help reflecting that we behaved very much as we behave at home in the garden that we love, declaring that the last blue creek, or the last secular olive-grove, was the most wonderful we had yet seen, for no better reason than that it *was* the last.

'And they told me,' said Lamia, 'that the scenery is so monotonous, and that bay follows bay, and mountain repeats mountain, with provoking uniformity. Why, there are not any two alike. I only wish human beings were as diverse.'

'It all depends,' said the Poet, 'whether you look lovingly or unlovingly, passionately or dispassionately. One must be intoxicated by scenery, in order to appreciate it. Tranquil survey is not enough, and scrutinising curiosity is fatal.'

'I am sure,' said Lamia, 'Veronica is not intoxicated. She is tranquillity itself.'

'Veronica, you mean,' was his reply, 'does not effervesce. But her silence is, perhaps, the measure of her emotion.'

'O stop! stop! I *must* have some of those anemones.'

How often a kindred need of this kind arose on the part of Lamia, it would be hard to say ; but, by degrees, every part of the carriage that was not occupied by ourselves was filled with tulips, wind-flowers, roses, and long branches of early-flowering golden acacia.

'You baby!' said Veronica, 'what are you going to do with them all?'

'You shall see, when luncheon-hour has arrived.'

'Which I think it now has,' I ventured to suggest.

Thereupon we came to a standstill ; the driver took bit and bridle off his willing little nags, and replaced them with well-filled nose-bags, while we unloaded our hampers, that were as commodiously as they were generously stocked. The unpacking of them went on under the skilful direction of Veronica, who would no more have dreamed of allowing us to lunch *al fresco* without spotless table-cloth, neat napkins, and all the apparatus of civilisation, than in her parlour at home. But she allowed Lamia to select the spot ; and the choice, though made from romantic rather than from

practical impulse, proved to be not wanting in comfort. Under a carob-tree, the first Lamia had ever seen, the cloth was spread; and then she scattered rather than arranged her lately gathered flowers, with infinite taste. A short distance away, as we looked under the olive-trees across the ruddy clods and accidental wild-flowers, were the innumerable dimples of the amiable sea; and, did we turn our heads, slopes of terraced fertility mounted gradually toward deciduous clusters of woodland, and peaks of more accentuated pine.

'Will it be very unromantic,' asked Lamia, 'to seem hungry? Because if it would, as I should not like to hurt any one's feelings, I can sate the edge of appetite with bare imagination of a feast, or, at most, with the unsubstantial pageant of a mandarin orange.'

Veronica's reply was to cut some solid slices of galantine of fowl, and to tell me to do the same to one of those long rolls of crisp crust which contrast so favourably with the semi-barbarous baker's bread of our own beloved island. The Poet, as of right, withdrew the tow from the withy-bound flask of ruby wine, saying to me, and to me only, as he did so, '*Siccis omnia nam dura*

deus proposuit.' It was our first open-air meal under the southern sky; and even Veronica, who, as we all know, is rather on the side of indoor festivity at home, could not protest that, in the shelter Lamia had chosen for us, it was a touch too cold for the pleasant and perfectly safe satisfaction of our appetite.

'Is it always like this?' asked Lamia.

'Far from it,' I was going to reply; but the Poet anticipated me.

'Yes, always, Lamia! always, always, always! No one deserves to travel who anticipates anything less agreeable than what he is enjoying at the moment. Should it ever be different, let us hope we shall know how to meet it. Meanwhile, let us think as little as possible of to-morrow.'

'We can all see,' said Lamia, 'that such was the spirit in which you travelled in your youth. In your rhythmical record of the journey which you took—not with Veronica, I believe,—along this meandering coast-line, there is never a stanza, a line, even a word, to indicate that the myrtle ever ceases to bloom, or that the sun ever forgets to shine.'

'You forget there is a terrific storm,' said Veronica, whose acquaintance with the Poet's

verse, though less frequently exhibited, is, I must confess, a good deal more intimate than Lamia's.

'Yes,' said Lamia, quite undisconcerted, 'only to disappear with the return of dawn, and never to be heard of again; and thenceforth we are told of nothing but genial airs, temperate sunshine, almond-trees and peach-trees ablow, and oleanders reddening into bloom.'

'You must remember,' said the Poet, 'that the journey was made in the very flush and heyday of the Spring; and, if I have in any way exaggerated what I then beheld, was it not the proper exaggeration of rapture? It is the instinctive function of Art to reject, to select, and rightly to magnify what remains. Looking back, I seem to have omitted much, but to have exaggerated nothing. Have you not observed that the first impression we receive of scenery, as, indeed, of people likewise, is the one that abides with us? Many times since, I have beheld this tract betwixt mountain and main veiled in mist, dimmed by dust, even powdered with snow. But I always think of it as I saw it first.'

'Do you often think of Olympia?' Lamia took courage to ask, seeing the Poet so effusive. 'Was she very lovely?'

'PEACH-TREES ABLOW'

'She was lovely beyond words,' he answered, readily responding to her humour. 'In fact, my recollection of her is that she was as perfect as the scenery in which she moved and had her being.'

'How nice! I wish I had been Olympia, except that she seems to have had rather a scanty allowance of luggage for a longish journey, and no appetite to speak of, seeing that, if I remember rightly, she was quite satisfied with a missal and some dried figs. I fear, after all, I should have been but ill equipped for the character.'

Veronica, to show her displeasure at Lamia's levity with things deemed sacred, had risen from the olive bole on which she was sitting, and moved towards the sea. Lamia, quick to take a hint, went on, but with an altered voice:

'Tell me, dear Poet, what took you first to Italy.'

'An irrepressible longing. It was first aroused in me, I think, by reading, in tender years, Arnold's *History of Rome*, whereby I believed as firmly in the Palatine she-wolf, the leap into the Curtian Gulf, the Rape of the Sabine Women, and the nocturnal interviews of Numa and Egeria, as in any of the immediate facts of one's schoolboy existence; nor did the iconoclastic criticism, with

which one perforce made acquaintance later on, in any degree shake that cherished credulity. What romantic prose originated, was consummated by yet more wizard verse. To no mediæval scholar was Virgil more of a magician than to me, and not even Dante would say of him with more truth—

Tu se' lo mio maestro e il mio autore.

I kept repeating, long before I could translate them into action, the words addressed by Æneas to his immortal Mother, when she appeared to him in the guise of a huntress in the Carthaginian forest, *Italiam quaero patriam;* for already it seemed to be a second fatherland. And when, at length, the moment arrived that the longing could be indulged, the only words I could find to express my joy were—

Tendimus in Latium, sedes ubi fata quietas
Ostendunt.

'Stop, stop,' said Lamia, 'I wish I understood Latin, but you know I don't.'

'Then,' he replied, 'do as I did before I first went to Italy, being then much of the age that you are now. I bought the best Italian grammar I

could find, and worked at it as a schoolboy is made to work at the elementary rules of a dead language. I studied the dictionary in like manner; so that, when I went to the new land, I might not long feel quite a stranger there.'

'The very thing I have been doing, until my brain seems a repository for the various inflections of the subjunctive mood; and, as Veronica corrects my pronunciation, I hope, by the time we reach Latium, to be more or less understanded of the people. But please do not let us concern ourselves with either my shortcomings or my accomplishments; but rather tell me, while I make you some coffee in this windless atmosphere, how you first went to Italy, and when.'

'It is a long story and will occupy some little time.'

'And so will the making of coffee, if it is to be made properly,' said Veronica, who had now returned to us, and to whose superior powers Lamia only too willingly surrendered that delicate task.

'One likes to think,' he began, 'that Heaven interests itself in one's training; and so I used self-flatteringly to conceive that a special care arranged the conditions under which one first

beheld the shore of Liguria. I had taken boat at Marseilles direct for Leghorn; and, in ordinary circumstances, we should have passed some thirty-six hours on the open sea, far from sight or surmise of land. It was, therefore, through no intelligent design of one's own, but through the sheer bounty of the gods, that the engine broke down a few hours after we had left Marseilles, but not so completely but that we could continue our journey. The result was that we had to hug the shore nearly the whole way. It was the September equinox, and the moon was full; so night and day we gazed on that bewitching coast; bay after bay, town after town, village after village, mountain-range after mountain-range, unfolding themselves to my untravelled gaze. In the course of our present journey, we shall pass ever and again through gloomy arcades and narrow ways whose unseemly aspect will probably shock Veronica and perhaps please none of us. But distance, the enchanter, presented them to me then as consisting mainly of granite palaces and marble belfries; and in every fold of every hill nestled villages that seemed built of porphyry, and wherefrom soared, intermediaries between earth and heaven, many-storied *campanili*, whose chimes, as they pealed for

Angelus or *Ave Maria*, we could sometimes faintly hear. There was no cloud in the sky, scarce a ripple on the water, nothing but sunlight or moonlight in the air. Sleep would have been a desecration of so ethereal a scene; and I well remember watching the rounded moon wax paler and paler as the morning sun reddened up over the wave, and then sink, as in despair of rivalry, behind the hills.'

'O, I say, it's boiling!' said Lamia.

I hope everybody knows that, in making coffee, that is exactly what it should not be allowed to do; and I fear Lamia had a malicious pleasure in finding Veronica for once at fault. I cannot but suppose that Veronica had heard the foregoing story many times before, but she catches fire so readily from any one's enthusiasm for Italy, that she had almost allowed the coffee to do the same. But she so deftly rescued it from hurt, that, unheeding of Lamia's exclamation, he went on:

'I saw, what we shall not see, many a form of half-mysterious loveliness flit by me under flowing veil down the steps of narrow streets in the Ligurian Capital,—for we touched for a few hours at Genoa,—and heard, what we shall not hear, jovial-looking monks vociferating Vespers in the

Baptistery at Pisa ; and then, Lamia, then ! I was borne, I scarce know how, along *Val d' Arno* through unending vineyard-avenues that seemed to have dyed the leaves with the colour of their purple fruit, and amongst which sun-bronzed youths, who appeared to disport rather than to toil, were singing love-songs to gaily-kirtled maidens. The fawn-coloured *bovi* oscillated homeward to the wine-vat, dragging after them the grape-piled *carri* with their wooden wheels ; children and lizards, seemingly of kindred race, twisted in and out among the workers ; and, stately of stature and sober of mien, dark-haired matrons stood outside their spacious but unluxurious homes, plaiting straw with rhythmically-moving fingers that never seemed to tire. Then came hills more rounded, softer declivities, a gradual narrowing of the plain, a forest of domes, belfries, and towers, and I was in Florence.'

'Why was your visit so brief?'

'You ask why. Can one give a reason for anything one does in one's youth? Only I remember, as I reluctantly quitted it, I vowed to return to it ere long.'

'And you kept your vow,' said Veronica.

'I remember,' said Lamia.

'You remember what?' I asked. 'You must have been in your cradle.'

'Then I suppose,' she replied, 'I was extraordinarily precocious.

'The sickle hath performed its work,
The storm-gusts sweep the aspens bare,
Careering clouds and shadows mirk
Cow the disheartened air.

'No swallow circles round the roof,
No chirp redeems the dripping shed;
The very gables frown reproof,
"Why not already fled?"'

'Lamia is very unmerciful,' said the Poet, 'and does not allow one to forget the sins of one's youth. But it is quite true that, before the leaves had fallen, one was again on one's way to Italy; not along this sybaritic coast, but through the austere gorges, now green, now gray, of the Simplon. When, having left the summit behind us, we zigzagged downward, the mountains began to wear a gentler aspect, the vegetation seemed more ample and more unrestrained, the air more soft, the sky farther off and more ethereal; and suddenly I caught sight of a huge granite cross, on the outstretched arms of which was deeply cut the word *Italia!* I trembled with delight; and,

from that hour to this, the word "Italy" has never lost its magic. On we deviously descended, past slopes of intermittent chestnut groves whose leaves, fantastically faded, had not yet fallen, till my driver exclaimed, "Eccolo! Signore!" and there basked Baveno by the edge of the lake in the setting sun, and the Borromean Islands seemed rather floating in the air than resting on the water. It was a true Saint Luke's summer, where all things seemed stationary in a season of arrested change before the winter winds should arise and everything pass away. I have never again seen Nature in a mood of such absolute abstraction and self-contemplation; and she communicated to one's spirit her own autumnal detachment from the seasons that are feverish with growth, and the seasons that are shaken by decay.'

The description of suspended animation in the natural world seemed to infect us with a kindred tranquillity, and for awhile there followed it a sympathetic silence.

'I know,' said Lamia at length, 'your aversion to the curiosity of the interviewer. But is it permissible to ask if it might not be worth while to record some such reminiscences as you have just recited; in a word,—do not be angry with me,—

BAVENO AND ISOLA PESCATORI, LAGO MAGGIORE

to do what so many other people have done, and to write an autobiography?'

'I have written it,' he said.

'And when shall you publish it?'

'Dear Lamia, it is published already.'

'I do not understand,' she said, 'for certainly it is unknown to me.'

'I fancy not,' he replied. 'Indeed, I gather that you have paid me the compliment of reading much of it more than once.'

As Lamia still seemed puzzled, Veronica broke in with a slight touch of impatience:

'You are scarcely as intelligent as usual, Lamia. Surely what he means you to understand is that a man's works are his autobiography.'

'Exactly. But enough surely—perhaps somewhat too much—of that subject; and our little horses are ringing a carillon with their bells, as if to remind us it is time we were again on our way.'

'One moment,' said Lamia, raising her hand deprecatingly. 'Before we quit this first fair spot of rest in Southern air, grace must be said for our *al fresco* repast. You know what form we like that grace to take. Be it as brief as you will, but it must be in verse.'

'We are not in Sicily,' he said, 'nor am I

Theocritus. But Veronica asked me the other day if I could give her some idea of the short pastoral idylls written two thousand years ago, which not all of us can read, but of which all of us have heard. I am not so presumptuous as to suppose I have succeeded in responding adequately to her wish ; but perhaps our almost Sicilian surroundings, and the indulgent temper of the hour, may confer on the attempt something of the appropriateness it would otherwise lack.

'Shepherd swains that feed your flocks
'Mong the grassy-rooted rocks,
While I still see sun and moon,
Grant to me this simple boon :
As I sit on craggy seat,
And your kids and young lambs bleat,
Let who on the pierced pipe blows
Play the sweetest air he knows.
And, when I no more shall hear
Grasshopper or chanticleer,
Strew green bay and yellow broom
On the silence of my tomb ;
And, still giving as you gave,
Milk a she-goat at my grave.
For, though life and joy be fled,
Dear are love-gifts to the dead.'[1]

[1] The Poet has since told me that these lines are a free paraphrase of an idyll by Leonidas of Tarentum, who lived in the time of Pyrrhus.

Then up we got, and onward we went, past rocks, and waves, and arbutus, and white heath,—not the white heath of home, but towering and flowering fifteen or even twenty feet into the air,—and *Cineraria maritima*, and Bacchic ivy, groups of eucalyptus and acacia, and glimpses of hill and sky, with here and there a hurrying zigzag torrent. What seaweed there was, was golden, and the surging and swirling of the silvery water over and among it and the red rocks was strangely beautiful. The liliputian waves kept coming on and breaking, as in any other sea, but never advancing. As Lamia said, what motion there was seemed purposeless motion, resembling the sport of children rather than the work of grown-up people. But her greatest delight was yet to come; for, late that afternoon, she beheld the first orange-grove glittering and glistening on the sunny outskirts of a gray-roofed little town, whose bright green *jalousies* more than relieved what would otherwise have seemed its somewhat sombre aspect. Thoughtful Veronica made her take the seat in the carriage where she might command them best, and her spoken raptures were what we all, though more travelled than she, silently felt.

'O, the Garden that you love is nothing,

nothing, nothing, compared with this, which is not a garden at all, but a fairy grove of light and lustre. Do let us stop and pluck some of the golden fruit!'

'Better not,' said Veronica, 'for doing so might dissipate your dream. They are lovely to look at, but indifferent to the taste. Neither is it their best season. Wait to gather oranges till, if ever, you are at Sorrento in the heart of May.'

'Yes,' said the Poet, 'these are well enough; but they are a feeble imitation of their fellows in the real South, the true Ausonia.'

Lamia was as ready to believe everything she was told as to admire everything she saw; and her only lament was that, even though moving at a leisurely pace, beautiful scene after beautiful scene was withdrawn from her gaze along that winding road, almost before she could really behold it.

There came a stage in our journey which, as you may suppose, was not by any means one of a single day, when I felt certain a question would arise likely to lead to some difference of opinion, and I was curious to see how it would arrange itself. But, like Lamia herself, who was the person mainly interested, I carefully avoided all allusion

ORANGE GROVE, MENTONE

to it. She, with infinitely more tact, as becomes a woman, kept gradually and dexterously leading up to it, while seeming to be quite unconscious of it, and indeed as if moving in quite an opposite direction.

'Now,' said Veronica, with that perfect freedom from afterthought or unspoken inner thought so characteristic of her, 'now we turn inland and ascend. Say good-bye to the coast-line, which you will not see again till we reach the summit.'

'And say good-bye likewise,' added the Poet, 'to the Provençal tongue, that seems to bear much about the same relation to French that the Venetian dialect bears to Italian, and to have retained the indefinable charm of flowers, perfume, and poetry that hovered round the cradle of modern verse, and has been handed down to us from the lips of lovely ladies and obeisant troubadours.'

Lamia showed no appreciation of these observations, as I could well perceive, and went on inwardly concerting a well-calculated strategy of her own.

'How long will it take us,' she asked, with apparent unconcern, 'to reach the summit?'

'Perhaps a couple of hours.'

'And to descend?'

'To descend where?' asked Veronica, who, I think, began to suspect what was fermenting in Lamia's mind.

'Anywhere,' answered Lamia. 'I mean where we reach, as you said, the coast-line again.'

'An hour perhaps,' I said.

Then followed a short interval of silence or truce, broken by Lamia, who, far too strategic to attack the question in front, was now evidently meditating a flank movement which interested me greatly.

'Do you remember my once saying that I wished I were a poet?'

'Dear Lamia, I can only say to you, as one so often has to write to unknown correspondents who send one verse, the intention of which is better than its execution,—

> 'To have the great poetic heart
> Is more than all poetic fame.'

'But, when one has neither,' she replied, bringing her forces rapidly into action, and resolved at all costs to turn Veronica's position, 'it is so nice and so advantageous to be taken about by one who has both.'

To the Poet himself, I am sure, this seemed rather wide of the mark; but it was just one of those complimentary exaggerations which Lamia invariably employs when she wants to propitiate Veronica.

'By one who has both,' she went on, 'and accordingly is everywhere vouchsafed a welcome not only for himself, but for all who travel in his train. It was not *very* comfortable last night at that picturesque *locanda;* and I confess I am looking forward to the prosaic domestic comforts that are promised us this evening.'

I confess I did not follow the workings of her mind, and almost began to suspect that I had imputed to her a design of which she was innocent. But I was quickly confirmed again in my original surmise.

'Was this country very different when you saw it first from what it is now?'

'Well, yes, and no,' replied the Poet, falling into the trap. 'Different where Pleasure and Fashion have invaded it: not different where Nature maintains her native dominion. Along the road, then the only one, we are now ascending, nothing seems to be altered. What change *has* taken place you will perceive very shortly, when

we arrive at the summit. Then one looked down only on the austere towers and jutting promontory of a rock-bound sea-moated Principality. Now, —but never mind!'

'But I *do* mind. I am greatly interested in these changes.' Then suddenly, 'Veronica! Has it not struck you that we shall arrive at our journey's end to-day in the middle of the afternoon, when you know you never like guests to present themselves? Do you not think it would be better if we got there towards tea-time?'

'Yes, I think it would; and we can easily loiter along the road.'

'Dear Veronica!' said Lamia in her most impulsive accents and her most irresistible manner, '*do* let us loiter *there* then, if only for an hour!'

'Where?' said Veronica.

'O, you know what I mean. *There!*'

'But we should have to retrace our steps.'

'A couple of miles only,' I said, seizing the opportunity to curry favour with Lamia.

'It is odious,' said Veronica.

'It certainly is,' added the Poet; 'the most offensive place I know.'

'It was not *Spiaggiascura*, was it!' exclaimed

Lamia in a tone of pathetic tenderness I never heard equalled, laying her hand gently on the Poet's arm. 'If it was, of course, I will not ask it.'

'No, it was not Spiaggiascura,' he replied. 'Better to think of that as a name that has no local habitation.'

Lamia had conquered. That last inimitable touch of pathos, which was moreover, I am sure, entirely sincere, had disarmed Veronica's scruples and the Poet's fastidiousness. By the time three more hours had gone by, we had seen it all, and were sitting under a brown awning, partaking of iced coffee to the strains of a Hungarian band.

'I am afraid I rather like it,' said Lamia.

'Why should you not?' said the Poet.

'Not the gambling, surely?' asked Veronica.

'Not the gambling, dear Veronica, so long as I have you at my side to buttress my somewhat shaky virtue.' Then turning to me, 'You know, of old, that I have low tastes.'

'Well,' observed the Poet, 'I confess that an earnest desire to be indulgent to whatever is human has never succeeded in eradicating the feeling that gambling is the lowest of all human diversions;

and, though here you need neither share nor even see it unless you wish, it seems to me to cast its ignoble shadow over the entire place, and to dethrone it from the majestic position with which Nature originally invested it. It has infected the architecture, vulgarised the sea-front, corrupted the very air, and exercised a malefic influence on manners.'

'And it has certainly spoilt the looks of the men and women,' said Lamia. 'I never saw so many ugly people as round those fascinating tables.'

'Gambling would make any one ugly,' said Veronica.

'Then I will never gamble,' said Lamia.

'Let us leave this,' I ventured to suggest, 'and sit among the flower-beds, somewhat too artificial though I allow they are.'

'They look combed and curled,' said Lamia. 'I am sure I am quite as natural as they are.'

'Dante had so exhaustive an imagination,' observed the Poet, when we had shifted our position, 'that it is not easy to suggest any form of repugnant penalty not to be met with in the *Divine Comedy*. But I think what is colloquially called a Hell might be added to his repulsive Circles. What Lamia

said just now is strikingly true. The place has a malign effect on people's appearance. Look at those respectable persons—for I am sure they are such—trying to appear almost the reverse. Great-granddaughters of the Pilgrim Fathers are collected here, just as cold no doubt as their grandmothers, but striving to seem otherwise. Looking back to those years when I first wandered along this lovely region, when this place had neither existence nor name, I cannot but regret the simplicity that has passed away. Nor can I think it is well for the idlers of material civilisation to parade their opulent *ennui* before a primitive people whom they will probably end by infecting with their restlessness and their discontent.'

'I can see,' said Lamia, 'this is my first and last visit to this vicious Circle.'

'Come, then,' he answered, rising, and we all did the same, 'and see how unnecessarily intolerant one can be, and how narrow is the slip of territory that modern pleasures have filched from peasant life and rustic toil. In a few minutes we shall be among the olive woods. Are we not there already? See! bare-headed women are washing the clothes of their husbands and children in the Grima. Look there, beyond! The goats are clambering

up the precipitous slopes, and browsing on the myrtle. What now do we behold through sunny openings in dense dark foliage? Meditating mountains and laughing sea. Let us recant all we have said. There is room enough in this large world for everybody, and manifestly quite enough for us. Man has wrung from Nature a slight concession along the coast, but here, as everywhere, the Hinterland belongs to Heaven.'

There was little exaggeration in the words. An ascent as easy as it was brief carried us beyond the sights and sounds of what Veronica had, with just alliteration, stigmatised as 'cosmopolitan canaille,' and shortly we were sitting on myrtle-cushioned boulders, and gazing out, through gaps in the silvery foliage of the olive-trees, at a sea unchanged since the days when Hercules is reputed to have traversed it.

'Yes,' said Lamia penitently; 'I own this is better than the chink of five-franc pieces, the lavishly gilded ceilings, and the hungry faces fastened on the gyrations of a whirligig. Yet, the rooms are crowded, and we have the woods to ourselves. The perversity that governs the lives of so many of us is, I have often felt, a strong argument against Free Will; and never seemed it

more so than here where, in the most enchanting spot I have as yet beheld, men and women are most artificial, and most intent on the ugliest of pursuits.'

Thereupon—for have you not remarked that the oldest subjects of discourse are precisely those which best preserve their freshness?—the conversation, in this mountain solitude, began to travel, if somewhat discursively, over trite ground, in the course of which Lamia rather ingeniously suggested that, as with every other human faculty, our will is partly free, in part under the sway of necessity. The discussion, if discussion it can be called, was confined to three of us; for the Poet remained a silent listener.

'Have you nothing,' said Veronica at length, 'to contribute to our deliberations? Can you not give us any help in our perplexity?'

I almost think I can,' he said, 'but not by any formal dialectic. Yet is not a universal conviction, of which it is impossible for human beings to divest themselves, as convincing as the most logical demonstration? Once after listening, by no means for the first time, to the arguments you have yet again been urging, there came to me the following reflections :—

FREE WILL AND FATE

I

'You ask me why I envy not
The Monarch on his throne.
It is that I myself have got
A Kingdom of my own :
Kingdom by Free Will divine
Made inalienably mine,
Where over motions blind and brute
I live and reign supreme, a Sovereign absolute.

II

'Ebbing and flowing as the seas,
And surging but to drown,
Think you that I will pass to these
My Sceptre and my Crown ?
Unto rebel passions give
Empire and prerogative ?
They are attendants in my train,
To come when I command, and crouch as I ordain.

III

'If Will by long succession be
Not arbiter of Fate,
Assail its majesty, and see
If it doth abdicate.
Chains that do the body bind
Cannot manacle the mind.
What fetters may the heart control,
Nor doth the Tyrant live that can enslave the soul.

IV

'In Spring, when linnets lift their voice
To praise the Lord and bless,
They are thus punctual of free choice,
Detesting waywardness.
Throughout earth, and sky, and sea,
Law is loving liberty,
That could, but will not, go astray,
And, free though to rebel, delighteth to obey.

V

'And Spirit, though encased in clay,
To sense's grovelling mood
Accepteth not, befall what may,
Ignoble servitude.
In the faggot thrust the torch,
Till the flame-tongues search and scorch.
Calmly the martyr mounts the pyre,
And smiles amid the smoke, and prays above the fire.

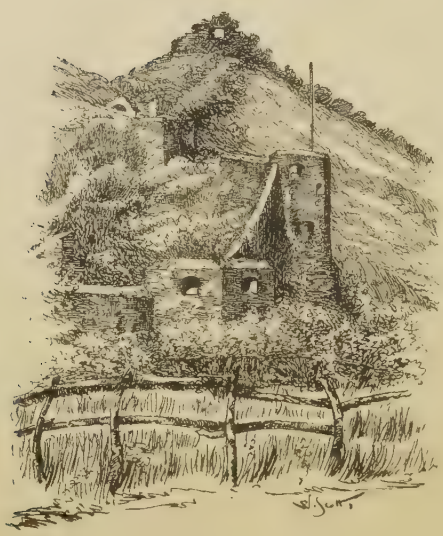
VI

'Nor is it Fate directs the waves,
Or dominates the wind:
They are God's servants, not His slaves,
And they surmise His mind.
If the planets walk aright
Though the dim and trackless night,
Nor their true pathway ever miss,
Know ye it is because their Will is one with His!'

An hour or so later, just as mountain and main

began to exchange the resplendent garments of sundown for twilight's more sober mantle, Veronica leaned forward, and, pointing to a motionless figure that with dark flowing plumes and glittering bayonet stood out silhouetted against the sky, exclaimed :

'See, Lamia ! You are in Italy.'



LAMIA'S WINTER-QUARTERS

'I WONDER,' said Lamia, 'who invented the phrase, "the sunny South"?'

'A poet, no doubt,' I answered, with perhaps a slight touch of malice; 'one who, in Bacon's phrase, accommodates the shows of things to the affections of the mind.'

'That is all very well when you are not in immediate contact with the things themselves. But here we have been for forty-eight hours, and we have not seen the sun yet. Tuscany could hardly have behaved worse.'

'All of us, even the most prosaic,' said the Poet, 'are makers of phrases only approximately true; but even to-morrow perhaps you will have to own that this southward-sloping coast is not undeserving of its fame.'

He proved to be right. The following sunrise rebuked Lamia's lament; and, when we assembled at breakfast in our English fashion, she declared she could have dressed before the open window, had Veronica but permitted it.

Still let it be confessed that 'the sunny South' is a phrase that partakes of some exaggeration. The South is sunnier, much sunnier, than the North; but it, too, can have its days of gloom, and even its weeks of capricious temper. Moreover, there is South, and South; and, despite Lamia's somewhat hazardous assertion that Tuscany could hardly have been more inclement than it had been in our new quarters for the first two days after our arrival, there is, as the rest of us well knew, a vast difference between its winter climate and that of the favoured region where, for Lamia's sake, we awhile were halting.

'Veronica, you grow more wonderful every day,' she exclaimed, under the influence of all-

glorifying sunlight. 'You have discovered a paradise, by sheer intuition.'

It is not the first time allusion has been made to Veronica's executive talents. They are so much greater than the rest of us possess, that, when anything serviceable has to be done, she reduces us all to insignificance. Without counsel or assistance from any one, and entirely by correspondence, she had procured for us, for three months, a home that we all, with enthusiastic sincerity, declared to be enchanting. If you think that an easy matter, I can only say, 'Try for yourselves.' It is this special difficulty that drives so many people who spend the winter months in the South of Europe to pass them in hotels. One and all we had avowed that we would sooner a thousand times remain at home than resort to that depressing expedient. Yet pretentious, trim, and conventional villas, with their cut-and-combed lawns, their formal palm-trees and dracænas, and their beds of dubious-coloured cinerarias, are the alternative that, for the most part, remains; and I imagine you know that would have consorted but little better with our tastes.

'I knew what you all wanted,' said Veronica; 'but let us,' she added modestly, 'give thanks to

Fortune, who has had far more to do with it than I.'

I verily believe that something, moreover, should be ascribed to the comparative slenderness of our purse and to the simplicity of our tastes ; nor do I pretend that what Lamia flatteringly called a paradise regained would have been much short of a purgatory to many splendidly-fastidious people. Our new abode had neither architectural design nor internal pretension ; but the taste of man, in partnership with time, had given it charm without and refinement within. Do you remember how, in that search which finally planted us in the Garden that we Love, we kept recalling the words of Tacitus as applied to the race whose preferences run so strongly in our own blood : *Suam quisque domum spatio circumdat ?* I hope we have nothing to conceal, but is not a sense of seclusion necessary to felicity? Unlike folk of Northern blood, the Latin race, and the Italian race more especially, have little taste for privacy, and none for solitude. To lean out of the open window onto the street or highway below, to sit on door-steps whence they can see and accost chance passers-by, to talk, to sing, to dance, this is their idea of such happiness as life permits. But the very spaciousness of their

hills, their plains, their valleys, affords to the more meditative children of the mist even larger facilities than our own land for gratifying the passion for that 'life removed' which the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, probably expressing Shakespeare's own personal taste, says he had 'ever loved.' Veronica had found it for us here. The spurs of the Maritime Alps, as they decline and dwindle towards the sea, enclose a series of gorges and ravines of various forms and dimensions. Some are narrow, gloomy, and precipitous, others gradual, well open to the sun, not too deep-bosomed, and gladdened by streams that have their source in remoter mountain-sheds. It was in one of the latter we had discovered the shelter and seclusion we desired. No wind could visit us roughly; for, if it blew from the north, we were curtained by the hills, and, should it rage from the sea, we were just sufficiently away from the shore, and protected enough in that direction by olive-slopes and orange-groves to be apprised of its displeasure only by an unusual rustling of leaves.

'But what do you propose to do in this ravine of rest?' Lamia inquired of me somewhat mockingly. 'Veronica is never without occupation; and here she will be abundantly employed in scour-

ing the neighbouring hamlets for fowls that have not become all bone and sinew by constant mountaineering, in checking the washing-book, and in raising the moral tone of the young people along the entire countryside. As for me, a determination to master the Tuscan tongue will give me rest from the fatigue of too much idleness; and my new tutor, the young ecclesiastic, whom Veronica has enticed from the Sacristy for my benefit, is quite charming, and makes me willing, as he also seems to be, to prolong indefinitely the time nominally allotted to the most fascinating of studies. But you? You cannot "garden" here, for the ground seems to do that of itself; nor, in any case, will you have time to pique yourself on the result of your labours, which, I have observed, is the main motive power of those persons who are supposed to love flowers for themselves.'

Wishing to divert her playful arrows from myself, I replied that I was indeed rather gravelled for lack of employment, and so intended to try if sitting in the sun and doing nothing would supply the deficiency; and I then added that she had forgotten to include the Poet in the catalogue of the unemployed.

'O, the Poet?' she replied. 'That is *un altro*

PEAR-BLOSSOM, MARITIME ALPS

paio di maniche,—you see my devoted subdeacon is teaching me the proverbs of his lovely language,—for he abides in a lofty ether whither I fear my shafts would never reach him. For anything I can tell, he may be writing an adorable sonnet when he is tapping the top of an egg-shell at the breakfast table; and I often suspect he is, in reality, in a fine frenzy, when he appears to be listening deferentially to one of my shallowest disquisitions.

'Would you marry a poet?' I asked. I should have half liked to make the inquiry more definite; but for that I had not the courage.

'Marry a poet!' she exclaimed, 'I should think not indeed. Poor Veronica! She manages tolerably well with hers, thanks to her good sense and infinite patience; and perhaps she is not as sorely tried as she deserves to be for the irreparable experiment to which she has committed herself. For us women marriage is necessarily the chief mercantile transaction of our lives; and, if one marries a peer, one becomes a peeress; if one weds a millionaire, one may hope to be a million-heiress. But the wife of a poet does not become a poetess. She cannot share with him his only valuable asset; and the supposed romantic nature of his disposition, which is usually a sheer fiction, not unoften diverts from her the

curiosity to which every woman is entitled, and which every woman who marries reasonably invariably gets.

'But if you happen to love a poet?' I persisted.

She quickly made me repent my question. 'You are unteachable. Love is a terminable annuity, that ends long before death, leaving one's declining days to abject poverty.'

At this juncture I saw Veronica and the Poet coming along the rose *pergola*, for January roses were pretty abundant with us, and I inwardly wished they had come sooner, for Lamia would not have dared to say such things in their presence; reserving, as she seems to do, her most outrageous utterances for my private benefit. But then, it is true, I should not in that case have put my useless interrogatories.

'Now,' she said, 'I am going to burn some incense before the Poet.'

'You know he loathes it,' I observed.

'Do you think I should proffer it so liberally if he liked it? We were talking,' she said, addressing him, as he joined us, 'of how we are to occupy ourselves in the quiet and unexciting quarters Veronica has provided for us. You, of course, can write a long poem, and I should think this is just the place for doing so, though I observe that

people nowadays deprecate the writing of long poems as being out of date.'

'I trust,' he replied, 'that will have no influence on their being written or not being written. Novel reading, I fear, has proved somewhat injurious to the more serious side of the imagination, and prose fiction has created a distaste for sustained works in verse. If Milton lived to-day, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* would perhaps still be more or less appreciated; but *Paradise Lost* would of a certainty be condemned as tedious. Even in his own day it had only fit audience but few, and few are always enough, if fit.'

'I hope,' said Lamia, 'that we who are here would answer to that description; yet you never read what you are writing either to Veronica or to me. I have often wondered what is the reason.'

'The reason is very simple,' he replied. 'Veronica is rather difficult, you are somewhat easy, to please; and, while she might make me too distrustful, you, dear Lamia, would, I fear, render me too enamoured of my work. It is best, I think, oneself to be its critic, and as searching and severe a one as possible; and then to leave it with all its imperfections on its head, which are sure to be very numerous, but are at least one's own.'

'I wonder,' she said, 'how poetry is written.'

'If I could tell you that,' he answered, 'you might conceivably take advantage of the information to become a formidable rival. But, as far as I can help you, I should say poetry is a natural and indeed inevitable form of expression, as I suppose music also is, in a certain mood or state.'

'And how is the state brought about?' she asked.

A smile came over his face as he replied: 'I wish I knew. Perhaps by consorting with Lamias, when they are not too inquisitive.'

Veronica remained seated beside us, while he resumed his walk under the roses. When he had passed out of hearing, Veronica turned to Lamia a little austerely, and said:

'There are some persons—usually you are not one of them—who are perpetually trying to invade the sanctuary of one's soul, with the result that one double-locks the doors. Only those who come to worship, not to scrutinise, are admitted. Have we not already been told,—

'What is it rules thy singing season?
Instinct, that diviner Reason,
To which the wish to know seemeth a sort of treason.'

'And again,—

> 'Why dost thou ever cease to sing?
> Singing is such sweet comfort, who,
> If he could sing the whole year through,
> Would barter it for anything?'

'Would you like him to sing the whole year through?' asked Lamia.

Veronica made no reply; for, though the question was put with an air of perfect seriousness, it might have been interpreted otherwise. So Lamia went on:

'I suppose I do not understand, because I am not married, and still less have the felicity to be married to a poet. But, if I were, I fear I should be exacting enough to wish to be even sweeter comfort to him than his singing. He paid you a great compliment, Veronica, the other day, when you were not present; for at the end of an interesting discussion,—interesting, at least, to me,—he said: "The sum of the matter is, bad wives are as rare as good husbands." Yet I confess it seems to me the worst husband in the world would be one who could find consolation in perpetual carolling. I would rather he beat me.'

I need scarcely say that I heartily sympathised,

VIII

Then we with following ear and heart
Should listen to the end,
Though we descry may but in part,
And dimly apprehend.

IX

Lo! soon he quits his heavenly quest,
Slow-carolling into sight,
Then, quavering downward, strikes his nest,
Earthward aerolite.

X

So doubt not, dear, that if I soar
Where none longwhile may dwell,
Though Heaven at times may be my home,
Home is my Heaven as well.

. . . . .

Notwithstanding Lamia's anxiety lest we should find ourselves short of agreeable occupation, our familiarity with a quiet and unexciting existence enabled us to pass many delightful days, while none were without their incidents and their pleasures. If I attempted to describe these, they might possibly appear monotonous to you; but they were not monotonous to us. Excursions to ruined castles, to picturesquely-perched villages, to slopes and summits famous for their wild-

flowers, are enchanting to those who make them; but one is hardly justified in demanding sustained attention for them from others. In life, as in Art, Nature is an excellent background to the actions and passions of human beings; and our almost daily quest of natural beauty was not unattended by experiences that aroused a feeling of pathos, unsealed the sources of pity, or awakened the always welcome sense of humour. The young ecclesiastic who was engaged in the agreeable task of reading Italian with Lamia was good enough to wish that we should pay him a visit, though he warned us, with much well-bred dignity, that his home was very humble, and that his reception of us would be equally so. He lived in an up-and-down hamlet among the hills; and we made the excursion, Veronica and Lamia on mules, the Poet and I on foot, with much willingness. Lamia spoke of him as her sub-deacon; but I believe he was as yet only in minor orders. He already wore, however, the ecclesiastical garb, and he had all the grave demeanour of his destined calling. He made no secret of the modesty of his origin, and confessed, with perfect simplicity, that he had chosen the sacerdotal state because, while having lettered

tastes, he could so best support his mother, who was a widow, and his two young sisters. He had contrived to pick up several volumes of the classics, which evidently were much dearer to him than the theological tomes that kept them company; and he frankly declared that, while deeply attached to his Creed, he would gladly divest himself of the cassock, if we would only take him to England, and put him in the way of earning a livelihood by such agreeable labours as he was engaged on with Lamia. Before we left, he asked if he might read us one of the many Sonnets he had composed in his abundant leisure; and it was impossible to listen to it without feeling that he was animated by that desire to extend the horizon of his existence, which makes the lives of so many students in Italy, both ecclesiastic and lay, so deeply pathetic. As we descended the hill, after visiting with him the unpretending chapel where he would one day minister, we lapsed into a compassionate silence, which I finally broke, knowing that we were all thinking the same thing, by repeating, though rather absently, the lovely if hackneyed Virgilian line :—

'Sunt lachrymae rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt.'

I could not be sorry that I had done so; for instantly the Poet, translating the line, said: 'Yes.

> 'These are the things that cause the tears to start,
> And human sorrows touch the human heart.'

'Did you notice the artificial flowers on the altar?' said Lamia; 'and does it not seem strange the peasants should proffer these, when their hills furnish them with natural ones, in such abundance, of exquisite beauty and fragrance?'

'It offends our taste,' said Veronica; 'but I suppose the artificial flowers cost them something, however little, while natural flowers would cost them nothing save the gathering. They want to give Heaven of their dearest and their best; and their dearest and best, poor things, are their small earnings and scant savings.'

'Yes, that explains it,' I said; 'just as, when we get to Florence, you will see the most fashionable of its churches, the *Santissima Annunziata*, bedizened all over with gold; gold being the dearest and best thing with the fashionable. Thus, both poor and rich alike are devout in their separate and distinctive ways.'

Do what we would, and divert ourselves in our simple, unpretending way as we might, we could

not help thinking withal of Florence, referring to Florence, and continually anticipating what Tuscany had in store for us. Lamia was the most impatient of us all, partly perhaps because she knew that concern for her alone still kept us from our bourne.

'Please do not think,' she said, one day, 'that I have not greatly enjoyed myself here. But what is it—for there is something—that renders life on this lovely strip of coast between the mountains and the sea, after a brief sojourn, not quite satisfactory?'

'Surely,' said the Poet, 'it is the insufficient presence of the Past. Every spot in Europe, as a matter of course, has had a Past of considerable duration; and this lovely tract of country must have had a chequered, and at times a very exciting one. But its visible relics are few. The Roman came and made his roads; the Saracen came and ravaged; feudal bandit harried feudal bandit; and the great bandit of our own century, Bonaparte, dispatched and sometimes accompanied his armies along it. But almost the sole vestiges of its vanished vigour and virility are trivial ruins devoid of architectural beauty; its villages are situated most picturesquely, but they are as devoid of

'BETWEEN THE MOUNTAINS AND THE SEA'

plastic beauty as an eagle's eyrie; their churches are touching in their devout simplicity, but, alike within and without, lack the impress of the artist's mind, the artist's hand. He has not been here; or, if he has, the *condottiere* has destroyed all traces of his work. Look at the sea. Byron most happily called it 'the image of Eternity,' for its Present is exactly like its Past, and its Future will be only like its Present. Man can make no impression on it, nor leave on it any trace of his presence. Therefore, despite its sublimity, most of us at last tire of gazing on it. It lacks human interest. When it smiles, it enchants. When it frowns, it overawes. But we cannot take it to our heart; and something of the heartlessness of the sea attaches to a land where neither poet, architect, nor painter has bequeathed monuments to remind us that here man has aspired and striven, here woman consoled and suffered. But be patient, Lamia. Florence is reserving for you ample compensation.'

'And yet you, or Veronica, at least,' said Lamia, 'would not let us take up our quarters at or even near,—but perhaps I had better not mention the place. Only all you have said seems to justify those wicked people, who find lemon-

gardens and olive-groves insufficient for happiness, and so have enlivened this lovely but unlively coast with casinos, roulette-tables, and pigeon-shoots.'

'And even the lemon-gardens and olive-groves,' I said, 'are fast disappearing. As we have observed only too frequently, they are being ruthlessly cut down, in order that, in their place, *Safrano* and *Marie van Houtte* roses may be grown for Vienna, London, and Saint Petersburg.'

'And then,' said Lamia, 'there will be nothing left but the mountains and the sea.'

'That will be a considerable residuum,' said the Poet. 'I happened to overhear a dialogue between them the other day, which, if you are so minded, I shall have much pleasure in repeating to you.'

'By all means,' said Veronica. 'Here, we are in the presence of both; so they will be able to judge if you report their colloquy correctly.'

The Mountains

What ails you, Ocean, that nor near nor far,
  Find you a bourne to ease your burdened breast,
But throughout time inexorable are
  Never at rest?

With foaming mouth and fluttering crest you leap
  Impatiently towards never-shifting beach,
Then wheel, and hurry to some distant deep
  Beyond your reach.

Nor golden sands nor sheltering combes can slake
  Your fretful longing for some shore unknown,
And through your shrineless pilgrimage you make
  Unending moan.

The Sea

Nimbused by sunlight or enwreathed in snow,
  Lonely you stand, and loftily you soar,
While I immeasurably ebb and flow
  From shore to shore.

I see the palm-dates mellowing in the sun,
  I hear the snow-fed torrents bound and brawl,
And if, where'er I range, content with none,
  I know them all.

Inward the ice-floes where the walrus whet
  Their pendent tusks, I sweep and swirl my way,
Or dally where 'neath dome and minaret
  The dolphins play.

Beneath or bountiful or bitter sky
  If I myself can never be at rest,
I lullaby the winds until they lie
  Husht on my breast.

THE MOUNTAINS

Till they awake, and from your feeble lap
Whirl through the air, and in their rage rejoice :
Then you with levin-bolt and thunderclap
Mingle your voice.

But I their vain insanity survey,
And on my silent brow I let them beat.
What is there it is worth my while to say
To storm or sleet ?

I hear the thunder rumbling through the rain,
I feel the lightning flicker round my head ;
The blizzards buffet me, but I remain
Dumb as the dead !

Urged by the goad of stern taskmaster Time,
The Seasons come and go, the years roll round.
I watch them from my solitude sublime,
Uttering no sound.

For hate and love I have nor love nor hate ;
To be alone is not to be forlorn :
The only armour against pitiless Fate
Is pitying scorn.

THE SEA

Yet do I sometimes seem to hear afar
A tumult in your dark ravines as though
You weary of your loneliness, and are
Wrestling with woe.

The Mountains

When the white wolves of Winter to their lair
Throng, and yet deep and deeper sleeps the snow,
I loose the avalanche, to shake and scare
The vale below.

And, when its sprouting hopes and brimming glee
Are bound and buried in a death-white shroud,
Then at the thought that I entombed can be,
I laugh aloud.

The Sea

I grieve with grief, at anguish I repine,
I dirge the keel the hurricane destroys:
For all the sorrows of the world are mine,
And all its joys.

And when there is no space 'twixt surf and sky,
And all the universe seems cloud and wave,
It is the immitigable wind, not I,
That scoops men's grave.

I wonder how the blast can hear them moan
For pity, yet keep deaf unto their prayers.
I have too many sorrows of my own,
Not to feel theirs.

And when the season of sweet joy comes round,
My bosom to their rapture heaves and swells;
And closer still I creep to catch the sound
Of wedding bells.

I see the children digging in the sand,
I hear the sinewy mariners carouse,
And lovers in the moonlight, hand-in-hand,
Whispering their vows.

You in your lofty loneliness disdain
Suffering below and comfort from above.
The sweetest thing in all the world is pain
Consoled by Love.

After a somewhat lengthened pause, Lamia said : 'With which do you sympathise, Veronica? With the mountains, or with the sea?'

'O, with the sea!

'The sweetest thing in all the world is pain
Consoled by Love.'

'And you, Sir Poet?'

'Surely, with both,' he answered.

'But,' she persisted, 'with which of the two, chiefly?'

'I suppose,' he replied, 'with the ineradicable selfishness of a man, one inclines towards the mountains. *Pacem summa tenent.* Serenity dwells upon the heights.'

LAMIA'S WINTER-QUARTERS

I HEARD the Poet's voice in the balcony, followed by the pushing back of heavy *persiane*, and then :

'Lamia ! Come as quickly as you can ; I want to show you what you may never have a chance of seeing again.'

There was no reason why, if there was anything new or wonderful to behold, Lamia and the Poet should have a monopoly of the spectacle ; so, arraying myself as rapidly as I could, I emerged onto the balcony just as Lamia, in incomplete but most fascinating attire, did the same.

'Oh!' she exclaimed. 'What hills! What slopes! What villas! But where is Florence?'

'Wait,' said the Poet, 'and you shall see. Like you, dear Lamia, she is very fair,'—how I wish I had the courage to address her in that fashion!—'but, unlike you, she has not yet flowered out of the night.'

'Neither have I, quite, I fear,' she said, showing, when thuswise reminded, a quite unnecessary concern respecting her hastily-donned apparel.

'She is veiled, absolutely veiled, as I have never seen her before, in a, shall I call it, *peignoir* of white mist, which conceals her utterly from sight. But look! she is beginning to disrobe her marble beauty.'

'O, what is that, that surges through the mist?'

'That is the noblest symbol of civic liberty in the world, the Tower of the *Palazzo Vecchio*.'

'And that? And that?'

'The topmost tier of Giotto's Belfry, worthy, by its sublime simplicity, to serve for the type of all great Art; and, at its side in the rapidly-clearing ether, the cupola of the Duomo, that Michelangelo would not copy and could not better.'

FLORENCE

Dome after dome, tower after tower, *campanile* after *campanile*, surged silently out of the mist; and, to use the Poet's I hope not too familiar simile, the silvery folds of night sank downward to her feet, and Florence stood in naked loveliness before Lamia's delighted gaze. Over the eastern hills came the bright vernal sun, every mountain slope broke into smiles and dimples, and in the last of its seaward valleys Arno glanced and gleamed with joy of the expanding dawn. Distance lends enchantment to the sound as well as to the view, and the clang and clash of innumerable belfries came modulated through the intervening air, wherefrom the last lingering trails of mist were gradually wizarded away.

Question and answer followed each other in uninterrupted succession. Yes, that was *San Miniato Al Monte*, with *La Bella Villanella* hard by; and that beyond was *Santa Margherita*, neighboured by the villa in which Guicciardini completed his History. And yes,—Lamia was quite right,—that was the *Torre del Gallo*, and away to the right and farther up the hills was the Medicean *Poggio-a-Cajano*, where Lorenzo wrote his poem on the *Ambra*. Over the matchless panorama of hill and valley her interrogatories wandered

unceasingly, whilst we called on our recollection to supply the names she asked for.

Suddenly, other *persiane* were pushed back, and Veronica joined us.

'What are you all doing?'

'Do you remember,' answered Lamia, 'the wife of Cosimo, Pater Patriæ, asking him, when advanced in years, why he so often sate with closed eyes, and his answering that he did so in order to accustom them to what they must soon always be doing? I am opening mine thus early, feeling that, in such a world as this, I shall never be able to close them again.'

. . . . .

'It is perfect, absolutely perfect,' said Lamia, 'and no wonder Politian found it so.'

'But did Politian really live here?' I asked.

'Let us be wise enough to think so,' said the Poet, 'and it was quite in keeping with Lorenzo's magnificence, when that testy scholar, to whom he had committed the tuition of his sons, quarrelled with Donna Clarice because she thought she also should have something to say to their training, to provide him with such a sanctuary. Besides, in Italy, Tradition is not, as some one has said she is elsewhere, a toothless old crone with memory

half gone, but the trustworthy depositary of unforgotten glories.'

'It is more than a tradition,' said Veronica. 'Only this morning I came across a passage from Politian's correspondence, which would seem to confirm local legend. Here it is. He is writing to Lorenzo. "When you are incommoded by the heat of the season at Careggi, you will perchance bethink you of the shelter of my abode, nor deem it undeserving of your notice. Nestled in the sloping sides of the hill, we have here water in abundance, and, being constantly refreshed by moderate breezes, experience but little inconvenience from the fervour of the sun. As you approach the villa itself, it seems embosomed in a grove; but, when you reach it, you discover that it commands a full view of the city. Though the neighbourhood is not without its denizens, I can here enjoy the solitude so congenial to my disposition. But I can offer you the temptation of other allurements. Wandering beyond his own boundaries, Pico della Mirandola sometimes steals unexpectedly on my retirement, and draws me from my seclusion to share his supper. What that is, you well know; modest indeed, but neatly served, and made grateful by the charm of his converse.

But be you my guest. The meal shall be as good, and the wine better."'

'How very philosophic!' said Lamia. 'So much so, that the passage was probably written on the morrow of a certain fascinating young woman, whose name I cannot remember, but of whom Politian, I have read, was, notwithstanding his erudition, deeply enamoured, giving her hand to a rival scholar, though which of them, I need scarcely say, I have equally forgotten.'

'The great Marullus, I think,' said the Poet; 'and your fascinating young woman was Alessandra, the accomplished daughter of Lorenzo's Chancellor, Bartolomeo della Scala, whose house, still standing, you must remind us to show you in Florence.'

Our first business was to make acquaintance with the immediate surroundings of the home provided for us by Veronica's indefatigable foresight, operating through a protracted correspondence none of us had been deemed worthy to peruse. The rural architecture of Tuscany is of a noble simplicity; and, in the main portion of our villa, built in the course of the sixteenth century, there was no deviation from the familiar type. But, adjoining it westward, and seemingly of more

A TUSCAN VILLA

ancient date, were an upper and a lower *loggia* of conventual aspect; the upper one having a sloping roof of rich red tiles supported by graceful pillars of *pietra serena*, and the lower one serving as an Italian equivalent of an English verandah, only more spacious and more tasteful, in which we could sun or shade ourselves according to the mood of the weather. Together, they formed an impenetrable barrier against the well-known keenness of the *tramontana*, while the main building provided ample shelter against possible inclemency from the east. To the west our view was over the final valley of the Arno, that spacious plain of fertile cultivation tenderly protected by hills of exquisite shape and moderate elevation, on whose bolder ridges stand historic towns of unmatched picturesqueness; while southward, over vineyards and olive-groves terraced down precipitously-sloping ground, we gazed on the domes and towers of the fair Tuscan capital. If one lives on the side of a hill, one cannot reasonably expect to have a very vast level expanse for the purposes of a garden. A quadrangular space of modest dimensions between the house and the low boundary wall, where the ground began to fall away, was all that had been dedicated to that pleasurable end; and

this afforded Lamia an opportunity of observing that two such enthusiastic horticulturists as the Poet and myself would find but few worlds to conquer in so narrow a territory.

'Forget,' I ventured to plead, 'what it is useless to remember. England is well enough, and so is Italy, but only on condition that you do not ask from the one what belongs to the other. I am not quite sure that the person who is intimately acquainted with both is ever quite satisfied with either, since it is part of our perverse human nature mentally to extol what we have not, to the depreciation of what we have.'

'Is it to a woman you say that?' observed Lamia, to my complete confusion. 'Men preach Philosophy, women practise it; and I shall probably show myself quite content without your well-filled borders, while you inwardly, and perhaps sometimes outwardly, long for your rampant greenery and untidy efflorescence. These *garofani*—you see,' she said, turning to the Poet, 'I know the Italian for carnations,—in their tasteful pots along the loopholed wall are much more to my taste than all the straggling annuals and robust perpetuals in the world.'

'I can see,' he said, kindly coming to my

rescue, 'you have found your proper home at last. I thought it would be so; and we can only congratulate ourselves on the result. But now let us explore farther afield, and we shall probably find that, if we will only use the word garden in a liberal sense, and indeed in that in which it is used in the corner of England where we have our home, there is more of it than we have just rashly assumed.'

Thereupon, we passed through a cool, spacious *cortile*, cloistered on two of its sides, but for the rest open to the sky, and whose only occupants were a disused fountain and a tall glistening orange-tree covered with golden fruit, of course of the hardy bitter sort; thence under an archway festooned with wistaria not yet in flower, and out into the *podere*, which I must needs call by that name, since there is no English equivalent for it, and which is nowhere to be seen in such perfection as in Tuscany.

'Indeed, indeed you are right,' exclaimed Lamia; 'right as when you once said that, were it always Spring, one would never garden, even in England. O this young green corn, with its purple anemones, its crimson tulips, its pale almond and intensely bright peach blossom, its fantastically

growing fig-trees with their budding tips, its burgeoning vines and spectral olive-trees, all dwelling together on the fair hillside that seems to be smiling self-complacently at its own loveliness! Look at that bank of irises, not yet broken from their sheath! But when they have, what a sight they will be!'

It is always delightful to have one's feelings expressed by some one else in language of enthusiasm one might oneself be afraid to employ; and we accompanied Lamia, as a sort of chorus, echoing all she said, and only too well pleased to follow in her footsteps, as she wandered on and on through a world of beauty wholly new to her.

'And these lovely grassy paths,' she said, 'that lead everywhere and nowhere, tempting one to travel on in search of something unknown, but with ever, on either side, more sprouting wheat, more pendent vines, more crookedly-branching fig-stems, more tulips, more windflowers, more mountains, more glimpses of towers and belfries in the glittering distance. In England everything seems to crouch. Here everything seems to soar.'

Lured onward by Lamia's enjoyment, and mounting by such easy and gradual slopes that we

hardly noticed we were ascending, we suddenly came to a grassy plateau almost encircled by secular cypresses that are the distinctive glory of Tuscany; and here we might have been tempted to halt, had it not been that yet beyond it were rugged paths that zigzagged among tall, dense bushes of white heath and yellow broom, both now in full flower; while on shapeless boulders and protruding rocks were the stars of the white, the yellow, and the rose-coloured cistus. Here and there we came on sheets of the single pink anemone; elsewhere, in the more sheltered nooks, were the Apennine wind-flower which, with due care and choice of position, perhaps you remember, we have persuaded to flourish in the garden that we love.

'As Veronica has told us that we are to lead a life of strict simplicity,' said Lamia, 'we had better do something to make it graceful; and, if you two will only cut some branches of heath and broom, I will be equally energetic among the anemones.'

We were descending homeward with our lovely spoil, when we heard a creaking sound well known to me; and, in another moment, we overtook the slowly-rolling wheels of a wooden wain—of wood, not only in its low, long body, but of wood

throughout, with wooden wheels, wooden pole, and wooden yoke—drawn by a couple of cream-coloured steers, and bearing a fragrant load of newly-cut rye-grass. Though at no little inconvenience and delay, on the incline along which it was moving, the peasants who accompanied it at once cried a halt, that they might show their respect to and make the acquaintance of the new-comers. Of the manifold charms of Tuscany, perhaps there is none so great or so enduring as the charm of manner peculiar to its rural population. Frank without being free, deferential but never servile, not without a fine reserve yet with never a touch of shyness, withholding not a certain tribute to social superiority, while tacitly intimating the fundamental equality that appertains to human brotherhood, the demeanour and speech of Tuscan *contadini* keep intercourse perpetually fresh, and impart to conversation on the tritest and most familiar themes perennial liveliness and interest. Their salutations, frequent though these be, for they would never think of passing you without one, are divested of conventionality by their manifest sincerity. They can never see you, never speak to you, too often ; and, whenever they speak, they smile. For thousands of years, morning has

risen upon the world, but without any diminution in its freshness ; and it is the same with their *Buon giorno, signore!* their *Felice sera, sua signoria!* their *Felicissima notte, e buon riposo!* their *A rivederla!* and all their ancient consecrated phrases for conveying their sense of the strong link that binds human creatures to each other. Every time they say these things, they mean them ; nor do they ever tire of the iterated and reiterated courtesies of life. The undeferential nod of Northern manners, the mumbled recognition, the slipshod salutation, would seem shocking to them, as lacking in human piety. On this occasion, no doubt, natural curiosity blended with native good-breeding to make them halt in their labours ; for they were, I have no doubt, as eager to make our acquaintance as we were to make theirs. Yet of visible curiosity there was not a trace, as they lifted their hats from their beaded foreheads and remained bareheaded till we begged them to cover themselves. What they conveyed was a fervour of welcome akin to the glow of an Italian sun, a welcome that warmed us through and through, and made us feel that, at that instant, we were forming friendships that, save for some fault of ours, would last through life. Were we all in good health? Had we had

a fatiguing journey? Were we comfortable and happy in the villa? They hoped we were going to stay a long time. Could they do anything for us? Did we love Italy? Had we been there before? O, but it was evident we had; for we talked their language like one of themselves (somewhat of an exaggeration, save in the case of Veronica). Yes, the season was fairly forward, and there was good promise for everything, given what was now wanted, plenty of sunshine. Commonplaces, you perhaps will say. Indeed, yes. But which of us in this world is so surprisingly original? The real originality, in some countries I could mention, would be amiability, unfailing courtesy in the ever-recurring trifles of life, a wish to please and to be pleased, and a perpetual freshening of existence by treating nothing in it as a matter of course, or as undeserving of recognition and thankfulness. Even the most original of us are original only sometimes; and, if we are to consort with each other at all, we must needs indulge in a good deal of repetition and commonplace. But freshness of manner can make repetition sound absolutely new, and kindliness of disposition invest the veriest commonplace with an air that everybody shall take for uncommon.

It was with difficulty we led Lamia away from her new acquaintances, not the least attractive of those being the sleek, smooth-coated, soft-eyed oxen that play so large a part in the picturesqueness as in the rural life of Tuscany, and that seemed to appreciate the tender stroking of her hand and the equally soft caress of her voice.

'I never felt such a bumpkin before,' she said, 'as in the presence of those gracious peasants. What barbarians they must think us!'

'If they thought that of you, Lamia,' I said, more struck by the exaggeration than by the humility of her remark, 'they certainly contrived to conceal their impression. Still, speaking generally, rural Tuscany is a school of manners.'

The noble simplicity referred to as the distinguishing mark of villa architecture in Tuscany, is as dominant in the interior as on the exterior of its buildings; ample space being their chief feature and adornment. Unless they have been invaded by modern hands, they depend for effect on bold outlines rather than on decorative detail; and they are furnished in harmony with the same severe taste. When Veronica admonished us that we were to lead a life of strict simplicity, she referred to this circumstance among others.

'I hope,' she said, 'you have left your sybaritic tastes at home. You will find many shapely but no comfortable chairs, no superfluity of cushions, nowhere a footstool, and, if you choose to lie on what looks like a sofa, you will soon find you are not reposing on rose-leaves. You must not come to me and complain that there is not a bell in your room, or, if there is, that it apparently has no communication with the outer world. If Lamia wishes to make a mess indoors with her flowers and branches of blossom, she shall not be denied; but you must not look for those more permanent graces of life to which you are all so attached.'

'Don't mind *me*,' said Lamia. 'I am quite prepared to empty my own bath, brush my own skirts, answer the bell instead of ringing it, and live on *fagioli* and dried *funghi*. Indeed, it was chiefly to indulge in those unusual luxuries that I came to Italy.'

Considering who it is that has created, cherished, and fostered in us those sybaritic tastes, and that attachment to the graces and elegancies of life of which Veronica spoke, and with which she told us we were now to dispense, we may be pardoned, I think, if, at the first opportunity, we indulged in some private humour at her expense. If we are

demoralised by domestic luxury, who is it but Veronica that has corrupted us? I protest that most men, in the matter of material comfort, are absolute Spartans, and, as for the Poet, his native austerity was once not to be surpassed, and he still indulges from time to time in his ideal, at any rate in conversation. But he too has, for the most part, succumbed to Veronica's unequalled capacity for making life at once graceful and commodious; and I am not sure that now he would not, if at home, feel almost wronged if, should he happen to want a paper-cutter, he had to rise from his chair in order to go in search of one.

'Just you wait!' said Lamia, 'and see what becomes of the simple life to which we are to dedicate ourselves. The first time Veronica goes to Florence, she will return, I will engage to say, laden with manifold conveniences of existence, and by degrees she will introduce a world of things into this splendid vacuum; and if, some fine morning, you meet a plumber or bell-hanger on the stairs, you need not regard him as an interloper. Nor would I mind wagering my next quarter's dress-money that, before long, you will see me sitting in the easiest of easy-chairs, and gracefully reposing on the softest of ottomans.'

'I doubt it,' said the Poet, 'for Veronica has a fine sense of the fitness of things, and her tastes are sufficiently flexible for her to distinguish between Northern and Southern needs, Northern and Southern traditions. When Francesco Cibo, the nephew of Innocent VIII., married Lorenzo's daughter, and came to Florence with a large and splendid retinue, he was entertained during the period of the nuptials with the utmost magnificence. But, at the end of that time, he observed that all the silver vessels and ornaments, of which there had been such a profusion, disappeared from the table, and were replaced by others of brass; and, moreover, that every meal was now served with the utmost plainness and frugality. Anxious lest his Roman attendants should carry back to the Eternal City the impression that he had contracted a union with either a very poor or a very parsimonious family, he sought to discover how they were faring, and found they were still being entertained in the most sumptuous manner. The enigma was explained when Lorenzo said to him, "You are now one of ourselves, and as one of ourselves I treat you. My grandsire Cosimo used to say to his sons, 'Remember you are only citizens of Florence, and must reserve what splendours you can command

for the glorification of the City.' As his descendant, I obey his injunction."'

'Hark!' I said. 'Already there are sounds of modern civilisation. The grass-plot is being mown.'

Lamia and the Poet listened, though I think the latter at once guessed my meaning.

'What is it?' said Lamia. 'A mowing-machine? I cannot hear it. I hear only the bleating of sheep.'

We passed afresh into the garden, and there was a flock of ewes and lambs nibbling the sweet short clover, attended by a picturesque shepherd girl, who carefully kept them off the shrubs, but went on industriously knitting all the while.

'Is not that a simple enough mowing-machine for you?' I asked. 'It attains to even Veronica's ideal of primitive expedients.'

'It is as simple and primitive,' said Lamia, 'as much of the garden itself. What a comfort it is to find oneself in a country where'—I imagine this was intended as a shaft against myself—'there does not rage a fidgety mania for perfection. Flowers here are reduced to their proper subordination in the universe.'

Whether Lamia was right or wrong in this

conclusion, it must be allowed that, as a race, Italians have not that tender attachment to flowers which is universal among ourselves, and that being, contrary to general belief, far less sentimental and more practical than we are, they do not care to devote much attention to the growing of anything that cannot be taken to market and turned into *quattrini*, or ready cash. Hence, they will willingly grow carnations, freesias, arum-lilies, lilies of the valley, ranunculuses, and such like flowers that find a quick sale on the ledges of the *Palazzo Strozzi*, or under the shadow of the *Municipio* in the *Piazza della Trinità*. But even these are so reared that the purchaser alone gets any delectation out of them, and the spot where they are produced is but little more of a garden in consequence of their temporary presence. The difficulty is to induce an Italian gardener to believe that you care for flowers for their own sake, that you regard the sale of them as a sort of desecration, that you feel they ought to be love-gifts, tokens of present or mementoes of absent affection, and, in any case, cherished companions of one's private thoughts, one's habitual pursuits, and one's transitory emotions. He cannot understand that you want to consort with

them, to tend them in sickness and health, to cultivate them for better or for worse, to let them twine and garland themselves about your inner and your outer life, to make them, in fact, flesh of your flesh, and spirit of your spirit, till death do you part, when, with a sweet form of suttee, they will come and immolate themselves upon your grave.

This conflict of ideals between the Poet and myself on the one side, and Ippolito, the gardener, on the other,—for the humblest folk in Tuscany have classical names, which they imagine to be Christian, and indeed frequently are so, thanks to some primitive martyr in the Church Calendar,—began at once, and never wholly ceased. We put our veto on the sale in Florence of flower or leaf grown on the premises; and as Veronica, with all her marvellous foresight, had not extended our contract to these, we had to arrange with him what was to be paid by us for what would otherwise have been profitable produce. Ippolito's calculations were of the most elaborate character; but their complexity arose solely from his scrupulous desire to do justice as between man and man. Personally, he had no money interest in the matter; for, but for what he regarded as our unaccountable

tastes, he would have carried all the saleable flowers twice a week to that charming little market-place which every visitor to the fair city knows so well, made the best bargain he could with the purchasing public, and credited his *padrone* with the amount received. Selling the flowers, he could know, to a *centesimo*, what they were worth. Not selling them, in deference to these odd *forestieri*, and therefore having to surmise what they would probably have fetched could they have been sold, and anxious neither to defraud his master nor to rob us, he lived, during our sojourn, a life of continual arithmetical anxiety. In vain were the Poet's magnificent endeavours to make him understand that we were not, as modern language has it, so mighty particular as to what we paid for rescuing the flowers from what he regarded as an ignoble doom. We could excite no sentimental emotion on the subject in Ippolito. To him it was simply a matter of addition in decimals, the sum total of which should represent the practical results of abstract justice. It must not be supposed, however, that this quite satisfied him, or entirely quieted his conscience. To the last he let us perceive that he considered our arbitrary conduct to have a certain moral obliquity about it, since it

A NOBLE FOUNTAIN

caused and consecrated so much absolute waste ; waste of time, waste of material, waste of money. Once, when we were not present, he appealed to Veronica, and asked if we were really in earnest in forbidding him to sell any portion of the flowers. The violets flowered by tens of thousands, the carnations were rotting on their stalks, and it was not possible more freesias could be wanted for indoors ; and, with his *Ma*, *Signora mia*, and *Senta*, *Sua Signoria*, he did his best to convert her. But she told him we were inexorable ; and, though she fully shared our sentiments on the subject, she laughed at us for a couple of *zucconi*, or dunderheads, for allowing ourselves to pay twice what the flowers were worth : a form of judgment which, as we have seen, was not quite equitable, but which nevertheless represented, with tolerable accuracy, the low estimate she entertained of either the Poet's or my capacity for a bargain.

Once Ippolito was thoroughly convinced of our obduracy concerning his mercenary traditions, he showed an amiable readiness to please us, by bringing pot after pot of well-grown plants from frame and shelf and sheltering nook, and placing them where we would, and mostly round the noble fountain that flashed quietly but unceasingly in the

centre of the garden enclosure; though he well knew that, even in the genial weather with which we were being favoured, the length of their days would thereby be somewhat curtailed; white arum-lilies, freesias, lilies of the valley, and early carnations, thus making a most lively show.

'Do not suppose, though,' I said to Lamia, 'that Italy has not its true garden season, even in the English sense; and I trust you will, in due course, be able to judge of it for yourself. But it is brief in its marvellous beauty. Like the people themselves of this lovely land, the year ages soon, when compared with the lagging Spring, the lingering Summer, and the slowly-ripening Autumn of Northern climes. But when the roses come they will come in battalions, the wistaria will run riot over wall and pergola, the *Spiræa Van Houtte* will whitely decorate itself with a lavishness unknown to chillier latitudes, and Madonna lilies will astound you by their height, and irises by their profusion. For a month, in a favourable season for six weeks, one will be embowered in bloom; then suddenly to find, if one gardens in English fashion, you have no garden at all.'

'A short life and a merry one,' said Lamia: 'an ideal existence.'

'But do not let us forget,' I observed, 'that when this brief exuberant blending of Spring and Summer has passed away from the garden, the purple and opal bunches of the festooned and trellised vine come timely to take its place.'

'Nor,' added the Poet, 'should we omit that bewitching preliminary to the profuse period you speak of, when, as now, in whichever direction you look or ramble in that astonishing valley, almond and peach, plum-blossom, pear-blossom, and apple-bloom, fleck with their rich rival tints, from purest white to rosiest pink, the silvery spray of the ubiquitous olives.'

'Silvery till ruffled by the wind,' he went on, 'as Lorenzo so admirably describes it in his poem on the *Ambra*.

> 'L'uliva, in qualche dolce piaggia aprica,
> Secondo il vento par, or verde, or bianca.'

'What an incautious quotation!' said Lamia; 'and, were I a critic, I should at once fasten on you a charge of gross plagiarism. I remember, if you do not:—

> 'The smiling slopes with olive groves bedecked,
> Now darkly green, now, as the breeze did stir,
> Spectral and white, as though the air were flecked
> With elfin branches laced with gossamer;

> And then so faint, the eye could scarce detect
> Which the gray hillside, which the foliage fair;
> Until once more it dense and sombre grew,
> To shift again just as the zephyr blew.

'Have I not established my case?'

'Completely, my dear Lamia; and I am glad to find myself in such excellent company as that of Lorenzo, more especially now that we have taken possession of a villa where he must often have been a guest, with Politian for host, and Poggio and Pico della Mirandola for companions.'

'I fear,' said Lamia modestly, 'I should have found them too learned to be congenial society.'

'Not when Lorenzo was with them; for he assimilated their learning to life, and contrived to make gaiety out of their scholarship. With more even than the statesmanship of his grandfather, and of whom it may equally be said that he ruled without arms and without a title, endowed with no inconsiderable portion of the culture of the students he so generously abetted, Lorenzo was a thorough man-of-the-world, and more than a respectable man-of-letters. I recommend to you his description, in the *Selve d' Amore*, of the shepherd leading his flock from the wintry fold to the Spring pasture, and carrying in his arms a

PEACH, PLUM, AND PEAR-BLOSSOM

newly-dropped lamb, his sonnet on the origin of the violet, and, still more perhaps, the one in praise of rural sights, sounds, and solitude. Permit me to cite at least a portion of it :—

'Cerchi, chi vuol, le pompe, e gli alti onori,
Le piazze, e tempi, e gli edifizi magni,
Le delicie, il tesor, qual accompagni
Mille duri pensier, mille dolori.
Un verde praticel pien di bei fiori,
Un rivolo che l'erba intorno bagni,
Un augelletto che d'amor si lagni,
Acqueta molto meglio i nostri ardori.'

'I fear,' said Lamia, 'I have not yet made sufficient progress in my studies to follow your recitation completely. Will you kindly translate?'

'Let a spontaneous paraphrase suffice, which will reproduce the original with, if with less literary perhaps with more spiritual, accuracy.

'Covet who will the patronage of Kings,
And pompous titles Emperors bestow,
Splendour, and revelry, and all that brings
A thousand bitter thoughts, a world of woe :
A meadow glistening in an April shower,
A green-banked rivulet, and, near his nest,
A blackbird carolling in guelder bower,
'Tis these that soothe and satisfy the breast.'

'Surely it is strange,' I said, 'that a man so

occupied with affairs of State as Lorenzo, conspiring and conspired against from morning to night, a landowner not indifferent to the prosperity of his estate, a banker attentive to the profitable employment of his capital, a father most anxious for the wise bringing up of his sons, a collector of manuscripts, gems and intaglios, a founder of libraries, an owner of alum mines, a prince, a statesman, and a diplomatist, should not only have experienced such a sentiment as you have cited, but should have found leisure to give expression to it.'

'And in so short a space of time,' said Lamia, more indulgent than usual to my observations. 'Was he not only forty-one when he died?'

'He was,' I said, 'but he seems to have lived every hour of his life, and to have acted on the principle he lays down in his contribution to the *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, that life should consist in equal parts of action and contemplation; thereby being rather at issue with Plato, whom he loved so well. But even in his most contemplative moods he never seems to be divorced from the themes that interest mankind. There is a passage in a poem of his expository of the Platonic Philosophy which some critics have thought gave Michelangelo the suggestion for his famous marble

Sonno, which you will shortly see in the Sacristy of San Lorenzo; while, in his *Simposio* there is a description of a toping friar which is worthy of Chaucer, and in the *Canzoni a Ballo* and the *Canti Carnascialeschi*, which I cannot recommend you to read save in what you will scarcely find, an expurgated edition, he expresses the very thoughts, feelings, and ideals of the populace of Florence.'

'Veronica shall be my Bowdler,' said Lamia, 'and meanwhile I thank you for your erudition! But, as it happens to be my birthday, do you think you could forget the Medici for a few moments, if only to wish me, in the most conventional manner, "many happy returns"?'

I had not forgotten the circumstance, and indeed had armed myself with a propitiatory gift which I intended to offer later in the day. But, before I could stammer out my excuses, she put her hand in that of the Poet, and said:

'Perhaps you have forgotten that, not very long ago, you rebuked me most gently for one of my numerous foibles, and that I asked you to tell me what I ought to do, and to be, in order to merit your approval. Will you, for a birthday present, tell me now?'

We had come, in our saunterings, to the long

low wall, leaning over which we gazed down direct on Florence.

'With pleasure,' he said, 'and I must only hope you will not think me too severe.

A BIRTHDAY PRESENT

I

'"Say what, to please you, you would have me be."
Then listen, dear!
I fain would have you very fair to see,
And sweet to hear.

II

'You should have Aphrodite's form and face,
With Dian's tread;
And something of Minerva's lofty grace
Should crown your head.

III

'Summer should wander in your voice, and Spring
Gleam in your gaze,
And pure thoughts ripen in your heart that bring
Calm Autumn days.

IV

'Yours should be winning ways that make Love live,
And ne'er grow old,
With ever something yet more sweet to give,
Which you withhold.

FLORENCE

v

'You should have generous hopes that can beguile
Life's doubts and fears,
And, ever waiting on your April smile,
The gift of tears.

vi

You should be close to us as earth and sea,
And yet as far
As Heaven itself. In sooth, I'd have you be
Just what you are.'

O these poets! I need scarcely say that, after this insidious effusion, I stowed away the present I had intended for Lamia in a secret drawer, reserving it for some more propitious occasion. I hope I am not prejudiced when I say that the verses were scarcely among the Poet's happier compositions. But diamonds would have lacked lustre, after such metrical adulation.

. . . . .

But did you go all that way, it will perhaps be asked, and introduce Lamia to the acknowledged fascinations of Tuscany, only to wander in search of wild-flowers, to climb rural hill-sides, to rave about scenery and sunshine, to listen reverentially to the Poet's rhymes, and to discuss things in

general, and Lamia's favourite themes in particular? Surely, you may be disposed to add, all those things could have been done just as well at home. Had Florence itself, its churches, its palaces, its galleries, its storied thoroughfares, no attraction for you all?

Indeed they had. But these have been written about with such minuteness by the learned, and with such fervour by the enthusiastic, that you would hardly thank so homely a pen as mine for describing them afresh. Moreover, let it be confessed that we had a way of our own, which is hardly the common way, of impressing Lamia's sensitive mind with the artistic marvels of the City of Flowers. To the rest of us, Florence was already as familiar even as the Garden that we love, and the Poet had a theory, in which I entirely concurred, as to how Lamia's familiarity should grow to be like ours, with a reserved freshness of its own. 'There are two ways,' he said, 'of approaching a place like Florence. You can try to take possession of it, or you can allow it to take possession of you. The first is the more usual, but the second is, I would suggest, the more excellent way. Once when I was travelling hitherward, I remember an American tourist who was the only other occupant of the railway compartment,

asking me if I knew Pisa; and, on my replying that I did, he said he should be much obliged if I would point it out to him. Shortly we approached it, and the train slackened pace in order to make the customary halt of some seven or eight minutes. "This is Pisa," I said, and he at once leaned out of the window, and there he remained intently gazing till its Duomo, Leaning Tower, and Baptistery, could be seen no more. Then he turned to me, and said, "I thank you, sir, for showing me Pisa. I should not have liked to return to the States without having seen Pisa." I beg of you not to take my fellow-traveller as a national type, for Americans are as various, and differ from each other as much, as the people of other countries. But I cannot think he had seen Pisa. Yet numbers of people resemble him in their tacit assumption that a hasty visual impression or snapshot, so to speak, deserves to be described as seeing, though, assuredly, where great works of art are concerned, it is not to see with the mind's eye, to say nothing of the spirit's.'

'I am easily taken possession of, as you know,' said Lamia, for a moment pointedly turning to me, who certainly know nothing of the kind, and indeed know very much the reverse, and then re-

directing her attention to the Poet. 'But, if one is to be taken possession of by all the lovely places and things in this world, would not one have to live to a rather venerable age?'

'There is an alternative,' I said, 'is there not? which is to be taken possession of by only some of them, but to be taken possession of by these thoroughly.'

'How conjugal and domestic that sounds. But it makes no allowance for feminine curiosity. I should be sorry, when we leave Florence, to think there was anything in it worth seeing I had not seen.'

'Neither shall there be, I hope,' said the Poet, 'but, if one is really to see what is worth seeing, I think one must bridle one's curiosity a little about much that is not worth seeing. The specialist, no doubt, must be boundlessly curious concerning his particular pursuit, and the professional student of Art is a specialist. We are, at best, only dilettanti, and seek solely to expand our minds through sympathetic and discriminating enjoyment.'

'In fact,' said Lamia, 'it is with Art as with Life. If one is to enjoy it, one must not know too much about it. In that case, I can promise

myself, during the next few weeks, no end of pleasure.'

We none of us, unless it be Veronica sometimes, resent Lamia's seemingly irrelevant way of diverting a discussion, and the Poet has less reason than any of us to do so, since she not only accepts his utterances as words of absolute wisdom, but invariably strives to shape herself according to his canons of life and conduct. Accordingly, when we descended into Florence, which was pretty often, she manifested neither impatience nor curiosity, but suffered herself to fall into the fortuitous fashion of wandering about it that he recommended. We had neither guide nor guide-book ; and, if any of us showed a disposition to enter here or to linger there, we entered or lingered as a matter of course. Lamia was left to her own impulses in giving much or little attention to tomb, fresco, statue, altar-piece, pulpit, or doorway ; nor was she distracted by any information concerning them till she asked for it. Then, indeed, it was given most willingly, and it was rarely that one or other of us could not answer her inquiries. The Poet and I were sometimes at fault, but Veronica never. If you think that by such a method as this much must have been overlooked that is well deserving

of notice, you must remember there was nothing to prevent us from returning to the same chapel or sacristy, the same monument or bas-relief, again and again ; and, so varying is the human mood in general, and Lamia's mood in particular, that what she would pass by on one occasion would wholly engross her attention in another. Thus there was a certain method underlying our apparent purposelessness, and I fancy she ended by knowing fully as much about Florence as those who order their visits to its innumerable treasures, while I am sure she enjoyed herself infinitely more. Moreover, this unsystematic system of artistic vagrancy issued sometimes in welcome surprises that extended the experience of all of us. One evening, for instance, just as we were on the point of quitting the city and driving homeward, Lamia said :

'Let us go into the Duomo for a few minutes.'

'But it is so dark,' I suggested, 'you will see nothing!'

We entered, nevertheless. It was the eve of Good Friday, when, according to the Roman Catholic Ritual, the Host, instead of being enshrined as usual on the High Altar, is, in commemoration of the sacred tragedy of Calvary, borne to a dimly-lighted Sepulchre, where, all night

long, the faithful come to watch and pray. The Office of *Tenebræ* was just over, and the worshippers had all passed out of the Cathedral. There remained in the doubtful light only a Verger and ourselves, till, from either side of the Choir, there emerged a figure robed in black, and bearing a lighted torch. Slowly, solemnly, and parallel to each other, they skirted the inner walls of the building, till they met at the main doorway, and then, at the same grave pace, they walked up the long empty nave. I had a surmise of what was signified by this slow and lonely procession, but in order to be quite sure I said to the Verger :

'*Cosa fanno?*' (What are they doing?)

'*Cercano Il Signore, e non lo trovano,*' he replied. (They are looking for Our Lord, and cannot find Him.)

We all had heard the reply. Then we quitted the Duomo, and drove home in silence.

Surely it is true, is it not, that accidental experiences have a sharper savour and leave behind them a more enduring reminiscence than projected ones? What one expects but rarely comes up to expectation, and has generally cost some thought or trouble to procure. What happens unex-

pectedly, if it be of the welcome kind, finds one disarmed and indisposed to criticise, and the emotion it excites is all sheer gain, no price of admission, to so speak, having been paid for it. Just as wandering along a river is more agreeable than walking along a canal, so people who canalise their lives and prearrange their enjoyments lose much of the enchantment which attends the guiding beneficence of chance. In Florence, you can scarcely halt anywhere, but story sacred or profane, saint or scholar, painter or patriot, poet, martyr, or enthusiast, has left some indelible trace to mark and glorify the spot, and to make you lift your head and then your heart. The very lapidary inscriptions let into the walls where architect or sculptor, jurist or astronomer once abode, are a continual invitation to the wayfarer to pause, to read, to ponder. Nor is it perhaps the most famous or the best known that are the most interesting and suggestive. The Poet seemed to have a special faculty for arresting our footsteps by those most worthy of contemplation. 'Is not this one,' he said, 'peculiarly consolatory in a period like the present, when most people, and the Italians especially, seem to think that originality consists in artificial novelty and even grotesqueness

—for that is where such novelty too often leads—of manner and expression.'

Thereupon he read: '*Qui visse e morì Benedetto da Majano, chi nelle opere sue confrontò con venustà di stile e di forme le grandi idee del genio creatore.*' (Here lived and died Benedetto da Maiano, who in his works conferred charm of style and beauty of form on the lofty ideas of creative genius.)

'To do that,' he said, 'is to overcome the main difficulty and solve the essential problem of Art, whether in marble or in language. In our day, too many persons shirk the difficulty and ignore the problem, and seek to conceal the poverty of their ideas under the extravagance of their manner.'

'Some of these are very successful,' I ventured to observe.

'Not,' said Veronica, 'if in the notion of success be included that of succession. Congratulated to-day, will they not be consigned to oblivion to-morrow, when right taste has resumed its authority, or when some one yet more extravagant creates an impression, equally sudden and equally transitory, of a somewhat similar character?'

'I think so,' said the Poet, 'and I am sufficiently enamoured of *venustà di stile* to hope so. As great a master of style as this century has produced says somewhere, "*On peut tout dire dans le style simple et correct des bons auteurs. Les expressions violentes viennent toujours ou d'une prétention, ou de l'ignorance de nos richesses réelles.*" Do you mind, Lamia, committing that sentence to memory, for I see you sometimes deeply immersed in works of much pretension, but consisting for the most part of *expressions violentes*, though I never observe you admiring in marble or on canvas the violence or the profuse colouring you occasionally tolerate in language?'

'Is it not,' said Veronica, 'that in architecture, painting, and sculpture, the manner in which a thing is done is so much more conspicuous, so to speak, than what is done, that failure, whether it arise from feebleness or from violence, strikes us at once; whereas, in language, what is said, if interesting in itself, makes us indulgent to, and indeed forgetful of, the manner of saying it?'

'I suppose that is so,' he answered; 'and perhaps it is one of the incidental drawbacks to literature. Fortunately, however, what you say is more true of prose than of verse; defect of style

in poetry being at least as obvious to fastidious readers as in marble. And yet,' he added, 'in our time, a grotesque, violent, and what seems to me lamentable way of saying things has been more than tolerated in verse, for the sake of the things said. For my part, I should be sorry to be original, either in prose or verse, at the expense of truth or beauty.'

The absence of method in our visits to cloister or gallery seemed to govern most of our movements. Sometimes we were but two, sometimes but three, of a company; and it would happen that, when we were four, we lost touch of each other for a time, and went our separate ways. Veronica not infrequently was missing; and generally, when this occurred, when she returned alone to the villa, she brought with her some 'object of antiquity,' as the Florentine dealers in curios and old furniture call such things, purchased after considerable thought and much bargaining. I think you know Veronica has a large heart, and would defraud no one of his due, and indeed would give any one more than his due, where no bargaining was in question. But she knows just as much about the date and value of *cassettone*, triptych, or embroidery, as any of the various dealers

on the Ponte Vecchio or in the Via de' Serragli; and she not unnaturally enjoyed displaying her peculiar learning in those interesting haunts. Her perfect familiarity with the language, and indeed even with Florentine *patois*, added to her advantage and strengthened her position in appraising the value of mediæval picture-frame or sixteenth-century mirror. Moreover, it is the greatest possible error to suppose that Florentine dealers are consumed with a single-minded desire to rob unwary purchasers; and I am convinced they much preferred to conclude a fair bargain with Veronica, than an unfair one with the first ignorant comer. Oriental ways and traditions of business still linger sufficiently with them to make *prezzo fisso* or a rigidly-fixed price exceedingly distasteful. Their day is long, they have abundance of time on their hands, and, if the few things they sell in the course of the week were sold without demur and in a couple of minutes, life would be insufferably tedious for want of human intercourse and agreeable conversation. Veronica invariably regaled us with minute accounts, on the occasion of each fresh purchase, of the polite but protracted controversy that had attended it; and very diverting these were. She preferred to conduct these transactions

ROSES AND IRIS

without our company; for, in the first place, as she truly enough remarked, we knew nothing whatever upon the subject and could therefore be of no use to her, and, in the second place, when we honoured her with our useless society, one or other of us invariably ended by showing signs of impatience, and to be impatient over a bargain is inevitably to get the worst of it. She did not always come off a winner in these friendly encounters; and she was just as candid and as diverting in confessing her defeats as in recording her victories. On one occasion she suffered a peculiarly humiliating disaster, which she detailed with much zest at her own expense. Wishing to give an agreeable surprise to Lamia on the occasion of that Birthday, when, as you will perhaps remember, I was so sorely discomfited, she went in search of some amber beads which Lamia had more than once expressed a longing to find in order to complete a set she already possessed. But it was indispensable they should be of a special hue. At length, Veronica discovered some in a shop in the Por Santa Maria, but, do what she would, and notwithstanding all her Florentine wit, she could not bring the owner of them into what she deemed a reasonable frame of mind as regards price.

'*Ebbene*,' she said, 'I will try elsewhere.'

She tried everywhere, but in vain, and so at length had to go back to the Por Santa Maria, and say she would take the beads at the man's own price.

'But now, *Signora mia*,' he said, 'that is no longer the price: you can find no others in Florence to suit you, so these in the meantime have become more valuable.' And he added some insignificant sum to the original figure, more for the sake of triumph than from any mercenary motive. Had Veronica been making a purchase for herself, I am sure she would have defrauded him of his victory by leaving him in possession of his amber treasures. But she would not disappoint Lamia, and so paid the forfeit of her unsuccessful strategy.

But we had a less humorous and far more touching experience on another occasion. Visiting a hillside village some twenty-five miles away, we were all much taken by a small altar-piece, a *Presentation in the Temple*, which stood in a side-chapel in a little church of otherwise no particular pretension. We discussed, then and there, by whom it may have been painted, for I need scarcely say that, on that subject, we all, like

so many other people, consider ourselves exceedingly expert, and quite competent to express an opinion. The *Parroco*, a venerable Priest of courtly manners but much humility, did not affect to adjudicate among us, but was evidently much interested in our deliberations, and still more in our admiration of the picture. At last he hesitatingly asked Veronica if we should like to become the owners of it. This had certainly not occurred to us, and we were rather taken aback by the question. But Veronica, enchanted at the chance of an unexpected bit of bargaining, said 'Yes,' without a moment's hesitation. So modest a sum, however, was asked, if compared with the high artistic qualities we had been attributing to it, that it went against her conscience, which, as you know, is the strongest part of her, to offer anything less. Moreover, she probably remembered, on second thoughts, that the place was not a suitable one for financial transactions; and any remaining scruple we might have had in completing the bargain was set at rest by his telling us that he had long been anxious to buy a second-hand harmonium that was for sale, whereby the services of his little church could be conducted in a more seemly manner.

The picture was carried off; and, by the time it

had been in our possession forty-eight hours, its artistic value had enormously increased, and there was hardly any Umbrian painter, Raphael perhaps excepted, to whom we were not ready to ascribe it. We discussed, over and over again, where it should be hung when we returned to England, and first one position of honour and then another was suggested for it. But, as I knew well enough from the first would turn out to be the case, it was finally assigned by Veronica to the Poet's study.

For a week she had the satisfaction of seeing all of us as much interested in, and as proud of, a purchase as herself. But, on the morning of the eighth day after our mountain excursion, the old Priest suddenly made his appearance at the villa, whither he had walked all the way ; and, in a state of much agitation, he said that he had come to ask us to give him back the picture, the price of which he would restore and which he had in his hand. At first there was a protesting chorus, and Veronica was particularly eloquent in pointing out that the request was most unreasonable, as we had given the full amount asked for, without any demur. Thereupon the poor old man explained, with tears in his eyes, that his parishioners had missed the

picture, and, though he had told them of his intended purchase of the harmonium, they insisted on its being restored to its traditional home, and all his pleas and arguments had proved unavailing with them. To such an appeal but one answer was possible. The picture was returned, and the Poet's study will never see that Umbrian masterpiece. Our disappointment was great; but why, said Veronica, should everybody be disappointed? Poor old man! He stood there a most touching figure. So we put our hearts and purses together; and the sound of the second-hand harmonium now follows on his quavering voice, when, in answer to his *Dominus vobiscum*, the entire mountain congregation shrills out, to its instrumental accompaniment, *Et cum spiritu tuo.*

As a rule, however, Veronica's purchases, over and above being definitive, were as useful as they were ornamental; and it sometimes seemed as though Lamia's predictions concerning the transformation that was gradually to come over the villa were about to be fulfilled. Veronica invariably declared that the furniture she brought back with her from the Via Maggio, or the Piazza Santa Maria Novella, was intended strictly for home consumption, and would in due course be packed

and dispatched to England. Where she would find room in a house already remarkably well stocked, was a mystery to all of us ; and meanwhile it remained on the spot, to whose aspect it certainly added finish and charm, and to whose commodiousness it materially contributed.

'I told you,' said Lamia, 'I should end by having a comfortable armchair, and you see I have. Nor can I well doubt that a host of work-people have been secretly introduced by Veronica, for I can now count on my bell ringing with absolute certainty ; and, as for Placida and Perfetta,' —Placida and Perfetta were two handmaidens,— 'though they still regard fair words and sweet smiles as the principal ingredients of domestic service, they have developed a talent for tidying my drawers and arranging my toilet-table which cannot but have proceeded from severe drilling by Veronica, while you and I were discussing the Infinite under the shade of cheerful boughs. Shortly after we first came, Veronica gave one of our dear devoted but somewhat primitive attendants a sponge, for what purpose I cannot say. But this domestic novelty was found so useful, that each of them in turn, she discovered, had the loan of it, till it came to enjoy an absolute monopoly in the cleaning of

the establishment. Now, I believe, sponges, and all other requisites of a well-ordered place of residence, are as plentiful as blackberries. Do you remember,' she said, turning to me, 'your giving me some most lovely flowers last week, which, of course, I treasured beyond words, even after they had faded. But I discovered, the next morning, that Perfetta, moved by a spirit of economy which seems to be a perfect passion with these dear people, was applying them, on the carpet, to the same purpose, I am told, for which we sometimes use tea-leaves in England. That was a sad ending, was it not, to your lovely gift?'

Lamia's observation on 'the principal ingredients of domestic service,' as understood in Italy by those who render it, was strictly accurate. They wait on you with a smile, and minister to your need with copious conversation. They will end by giving you all you ask for; but you must ask, and you must not expect that, having asked for it ninety-nine times, you will get it the hundredth, without asking for it again. That would be to defraud them, and you as well, of an opportunity of talk, the thing they love most in the world. Moreover, they have an invincible objection to being made methodical; nor can you give them

greater pleasure than to ask them to do the work naturally pertaining to somebody else. The cook would be delighted to nurse the baby, the housemaid would find it quite natural to be bidden to cook the dinner, the butler would eagerly go in search of the vegetables, and the gardener at once mount the box and drive you into Florence. Only do not ask them to be perfect, according to English ideas, in their own line. They will do anything on earth for you, if you go the right way about it; but they will not be turned into machines. Nothing I have ever seen in Veronica is more admirable, or shows so conclusively the discrimination she can blend with her love of order, than the amount of method, limited no doubt but quite unusual, with which, for the time at least, she imbued those about us; and Lamia, as we have seen, indulged in a little characteristic raillery on the subject.

'It is all very well,' said the Poet, 'for us to have our little joke about a certain person's passion for discipline. But, upon my word, what Italy stands in need of is a Ruler with plenary powers, of the temperament and talents of Veronica. So the Roman Empire was founded, so the British. Dear Lamia, you are very charming; our friend

here is, I do not forget, a gardener of much repute, and I write verses which, I am told, sometimes give pleasure to people who are easily pleased. But Veronica is worth all of us put together a hundred times over.'

'Quite so,' said Lamia. 'Veronica is our *Minerva Medica*, whose salutary if sometimes unpalatable wisdom keeps us in such tolerable health as moral valetudinarians like myself are capable of; whereas I am but a would-be Egeria, who have not yet succeeded in inducing any one, and you, dear Poet, least of all, to be my Numa. Still, do not judge me altogether by the way in which I conduct myself here, among a people very much after my own heart. I *have* a conscience, which I showed by declaring it at the frontier, as I heard it was contraband. I proved to be right; it was confiscated, and I have got on very comfortably without it ever since. Indeed, I should have missed a new gown much more. Poets, we all know, never have a conscience, in any country. But, as Veronica has enough for two, indeed—obligingly remembering my existence—for three, I daresay we shall continue to manage fairly well in this easy-going land, with Veronica's occasional assistance.'

At this moment, Veronica joined us under the lower *loggia*, where we had for some time been sitting, and desisting more frequently than perhaps you have imagined, from audible converse, in order to commune silently with the plashing of the fountain in front of us, with city, plain, and river far below, and with hill-slope and summit everywhere around us. The sun had just disappeared; and, each instant, mountain and sky grew more and more unreal, more and more transfigured in the afterglow. The last *Ave Maria* bell had rung; the last wain drawn by the sleek, swaying oxen had creaked up the hill; and, somewhere among the more distant olives, a peasant lingering at his work, but pondering aloud on his love, sang out with clear voice to the clear air:

'Fin al fin de' giorni miei,
Io te sola voglio amar.'

'You never told us,' said Veronica, 'what you two did yesterday afternoon.' The two were the Poet and Lamia.

'You scarcely gave us the chance,' Lamia replied. 'We were all so absorbed in admiring the bust you brought from Florence of the founder of the Magliabecchian Library, whose name I have

already forgotten, but who was himself, you told us, what you, dear Veronica, will become if you go on accumulating stray black-letter volumes at the rate you are doing at present,—*quædam bibliotheca*. But have a care. What if they were lost or stolen? I was reading only yesterday that, when Guarino, returning to Florence from Constantinople with a cargo of Greek manuscripts, was shipwrecked, and all his treasures went to the bottom of the sea, his hair turned white. See how well-informed I am getting. I can tell you still more on this interesting subject, and indeed meditate lecturing on it next winter in the Sala Dante. Cosimo de' Medici healed a political breach with Alfonso of Naples by sending him a Manuscript of Livy; and Lorenzo declared to Pico della Mirandola, probably where we are now sitting, that, if his fortune proved insufficient, he would pledge his furniture in order to buy books. But, when your purse gives out, you will spare my easy-chair, Veronica, won't you?'

'You have still not told us where you went yesterday afternoon.'

Lamia remained silent; leaving it to the Poet to reply:

'We carried some flowers to the grave of Elizabeth Barrett Browning.'

Again there was silence. Then, shortly, Veronica asked :

'Did nothing come of it?'

We all well knew the meaning of the question, and so did he, and accordingly replied :

'Well, yes, something came of it, such as it is' ; and, not waiting for us to express a desire he was aware we all entertained, he unaffectedly recited to us the following lines :—

AT HER GRAVE

I

Lo, here among the rest you sleep,
  As though no difference were
'Twixt them and you, more wide, more deep,
Than such as fondness loves to keep
  Round each lone sepulchre.

II

Yet they but human, you divine,
  Warmed by that heavenly breath,
Which, when ephemeral lights decline,
Like lamp before nocturnal shrine,
  Still burneth after death.

III

Yes, here in Tuscan soil you lie,
With Tuscan turf above ;
And, lifting silent spires on high,
The cypresses remind the sky
Of the city of your love.

IV

And you did grow so like to her
Wherein you dwelt so long,
Your thoughts, like her May roses, were
Untrained, unchecked, but how astir,
And oh how sweet, with song !

V

The Poet of Olympian mien
His frenzy doth control,
And, gazing on the dread Unseen,
Keep mind majestic, will serene,
And adamantine soul.

VI

He, save to Wisdom sternly true,
Is but the sport of Fate
And gladiatorial pain. But you !
A poet, and a woman too !
The burden was too great.

VII

And so you laid it down, and here,
Oblivious of life's load,
Quiet you sleep through all the year,
Young Spring, staid Summer, Autumn sere,
And Winter's icy goad.

VIII

The swallows, freshly on the wing,
In April's sun rejoice ;
The nightingales unceasing sing ;
Yes, Spring brings back the birds of Spring,
But not, alas ! your voice.

IX

So round your sleep I soft let fall
Frail emblems of regret ;
The lowly wind-flower, tulip tall,
The iris mantling wayside wall,
And weeping violet.

X

My votive flowers to-day will blow,
To-morrow be decayed ;
But, though long sunk from sight, I know,
The glory of your afterglow
Will never wholly fade.

LAMIA'S WINTER-QUARTERS

It was *Pasqua delle Rose*, literally Easter of Roses, to distinguish it from *Pasqua delle Uova*, or Easter of Eggs ; in other words, Whitsuntide. We were indebted to Lamia for this pretty designation, which was new to all of us, and she had made acquaintance with it in the course of conversation with Perfetta, who, though by no means what her name implied, and, indeed, as Veronica said, the most imperfect of our native retainers, had long since quite won Lamia's heart by a spontaneous compliment. Very early on in her study of

Italian, Lamia had displayed an extraordinarily fine ear for the pronunciation of that language, and a quick talent for assimilating its most familiar phrases, so that Perfetta one day declared she must surely be of Italian parentage.

'Indeed she is not,' I said. 'Guess from what land she comes?'

Perfetta looked at her for a moment, and then exclaimed: '*Dal Paradiso.*'

Lamia treated this suggestion of celestial origin with much levity, but, all the same, made Perfetta a present of a gown which she declared was worn out; though to my masculine perception it seemed almost as good as new, and Veronica confirmed my impression by reproving her for spoiling Perfetta at the same time that she deprived herself of a still very excellent garment.

'I am sure,' said Lamia, apologetically, 'you would not scold me if you had seen Perfetta's delight, and heard her expression of it. If one gives a gown to one's English maid, one receives a most respectful "Thank you, Miss," and never hears another word about it; and, likely enough, she sells it, having no sentiment on the subject whatever. But Perfetta went into raptures over the poor little gown, hugged it, kissed it, spread

it to the light, and has recurred to it again and again. Indeed, to listen to her is to have a lesson in Italian expletives of admiration. She would keep it, she said, for Feast days, not even for ordinary Sundays, unless perhaps she put it on, for the first time, on the festival of her patron Saint. Finally, she declared she would wear it, for the first time, at *Pasqua delle Rose*, and so you saw her in it yesterday. But, if I gave her the gown, I have likewise made you all a present of a most beautiful phrase; and, if you still are of opinion that I have left myself short of a frock, it is always open to any one to manifest gratitude by replacing it.'

It was, indeed, an Easter, or, if you will, a Whitsuntide, of Roses. They were everywhere; clambering up the house, drooping from the roof, running along the walls, carpeting the ground, festooning themselves from elm to elm, interlaced with the cypresses, peering through porch and casement, covering stable and concealing shed, scaling the tallest and seemingly most inaccessible places, and thence falling down in untrained profusion, veritable cascades of colour. We talked of them from morning to night; we lived, moved, and had our being among them, left them only to go back to them, vowed these were the most

beautiful,—no, those,—no, those others, and perpetually expressed ourselves in fickle and contradictory adoration. As Lamia wandered among them, she would break into song, chanting their praises, now in one tongue, now in another.

'Roses crimson, roses white,
Deadly pale or lovely blushing,
Both in love with May at sight,
And their maiden blood is rushing
To and fro in hope to hide
Tumult it but thus discloses.
Bring the Bridegroom to the Bride!
Everywhere are roses, roses.'

Then she would remember snatches of Lorenzo's *Canzone a Ballo*, '*Ben venga Maggio*,' written in the local dialect of the time, and improvise for them a suitable strain.

'E voi, donzelle a schiera,
Con li vostri amadori,
Che di rose e di fiori
Vi fate belle, il Maggio,
Che è giovane e bella,
Deh non sie punto acerba,
Che non si rinnovella
L' età come fa l' herba.
Nessuna stia superba.
Al' amadore, il Maggio.'

'EVERYWHERE ARE ROSES, ROSES'

Then she would revert to her own tongue, in its paraphrase of the pagan song the *Compagnacci* used to troll in the days of Savonarola, when they wanted to protest against the austerity of his followers and the Burning of the Vanities.

'Every wall is white with roses,
Linnets pair in every tree;
Brim your beakers, twine your posies,
Kiss and quaff ere Springtime closes;
Bloom and beauty quickly flee.'

If we drove down to Florence, we drove along roads that were avenues of roses; and, in the Fair City itself, we forget to look at palace, or façade, or bridge, absorbed in gazing on the white and yellow Banksias that hung in bunches and clusters over intramural garden-walls. But, as the year expanded and deepened in beauty, we grew more and more unwilling to stir from the enchanting surroundings of the villa itself, unless it were to wander in other *poderi* and among other vineyards, or to make expeditions that took us uninterruptedly through a world of radiant newness. Lamia did not now inquire how we proposed to employ ourselves, since being alive was in itself occupation enough. Lest, however, as she said, Veronica's conscience should prick her for so much

time passed in the mere delight of doing nothing, she read us the following passage written by Lorenzo de' Medici, and which she said she intended to recite to a larger audience whenever she delivered those lectures in the *Sala Dante*.

'What can be more worthy of desire to a well-regulated mind than the enjoyment of leisure with dignity? That is what all good men wish to attain, but what great men alone accomplish. In the progress of public affairs we may indeed be allowed to look forward to a period of rest; but no repose should totally seclude us from attention to the concerns of our country. I cannot deny that the path it has been my lot to tread has been arduous and rugged, full of danger, and beset with treachery; but I console myself with the thought of having contributed to the welfare of the State, the prosperity of which now rivals that of any other, however flourishing. Neither have I been inattentive to the interests and advancement of my family, having always proposed for my imitation the example of my grandfather Cosimo, who watched over his public and his private concerns with equal vigilance. Having now attained the object of my cares, I trust I may be allowed to enjoy the sweets of leisure, to share in the reputa-

tion of my fellow-citizens, and to exult in the glory of my native city.'

'The passage is very interesting,' said the Poet, 'and serves to strengthen one's impression of the sanity and completeness of Lorenzo's talents. But is it not also another contribution to the vanity of human wishes and the fatuity of human self-complacency? I do not think Lorenzo ever attained to that enjoyment of dignity with leisure of which he speaks; and assuredly he had not long been dead before the glory of his native city, in the sense in which he used the phrase, passed away.'

'If one is to believe Politian,' I said, 'either the famous death-bed colloquy with Savonarola never took place, or it left but little impression on the dying man.'

'That is a story,' said the Poet, 'one would part with unwillingly. But what is it that Politian says?'

'That to judge by Lorenzo's behaviour, and that of his attendants, when he was dying, you would have thought it was they who momentarily expected that fate, and he alone that was exempt from it.'

'There is no tomb nor inscription, is there,' asked Lamia, 'to mark the place that received his

ashes, while his unworthier successors have a sumptuous monument designed by Michelangelo, whom in the budding days of his genius Lorenzo used to place, out of respect for his talent, above his own sons at table?'

'I suppose,' said Veronica, 'he was paid for the monument he executed, and could not execute the one the cost of which there was no one to defray. But do not let us forget that what he felt concerning the contrast between the earlier and the later Medici is for ever embodied in his famous quatrain. Repeat it to us, Lamia.'

'With pleasure, if I can.'

'Grato m' è il sonno, e più l' esser di sasso,
Mentre che il danno e la vergogna dura.
Non veder, non sentir, m' è gran ventura:
Però, non mi destar. Deh! parla basso.'

'How would one translate it?'

'Translation is a difficult craft,' said the Poet; 'but, after visiting San Lorenzo again the other day, I could not resist trying to render those noble lines into our own tongue.

'Nay, let me sleep, or, best, be stone or steel,
While still endures this infamy of woe.
My one sole bliss is nor to see nor feel:
So, wake me not; and, lest you should, speak low.'

'How utterly out of place,' said Lamia, 'a character like Michelangelo seems in Florentine history! whereas Lorenzo is its very type and representative.'

'Do you not forget,' said Veronica, 'that perhaps the three most austere human figures known to us were Florentines, either by birth or by adoption: Michelangelo, Dante, and Savonarola.'

'That only makes it all the more strange,' I said.

'But why?' said the Poet. 'Have we not, in these days, succumbed too readily to the notion that we are the creatures of our surroundings, and what is called our *habitat?* And is not that theory a mere *ex-post-facto* explanation that explains nothing? Who would ever have thought of predicting that any of the three great Puritans you have named would be associated with Florence, and the greatest of the three be born and bred in the very heart of her? Must we not look elsewhere for the explanation?'

> 'Know, Nature, like the cuckoo, laughs at law,
> Placing her eggs in whatso nest she will;
> And when, at callow-time, you think to find
> The sparrow's stationary chirp, lo! bursts
> Voyaging voice to glorify the Spring.'

'In the same way characters, austere or the reverse, make their appearance in the most unlikely places. We hear too much, I think, of the Spirit of the Age. Shall we not rather believe that the Age is what great Spirits make it?'

'There,' said Veronica, 'do you not press your own theory too far? Without for one moment denying that the sudden appearance of great characters, or the place where they appear, is not to be foretold, one can hardly help feeling that Dante, Savonarola, and Michelangelo, in consequence of something adverse in the Florentine character, did not succeed in making Florence what they would fain have made her.'

'Truly great characters,' said Lamia, 'always fail. Only second-rate people succeed. For my part I am very glad of it, for nothing is so disappointing as failure,—except success.'

'There is a good deal in what you say,' I was rather surprised to hear the Poet reply. 'But perhaps we have all, and myself most of all, drifted into a vein of exaggeration. I was betrayed into it by the excessive claim which it seems to me many nowadays advance for Science, as compared with other sources of instruction and helps to life. Our debt to Science is great. At the same time, it has

its limits, and I cannot think it is the greatest of our obligations. Do you remember that profound saying of Pascal, "*La science des choses extérieures ne me consolera pas de l'ignorance de la morale au temps d'affliction, mais la science des mœurs me consolera toujours de l'ignorance des sciences extérieures*"? Such a line, for instance, as that of Shakespeare,

"In Nature there's no blemish but the mind,"

is more deeply and enduringly helpful than steam-engines, electric lights, or anæsthetics. One can, in case of necessity, dispense with tramways and telephones; but we cannot dispense with right thinking and right feeling. The material discoveries of the Age do it much honour; but man's triumph over matter is most nobly displayed when he triumphs over the matter of which he is himself composed; when he ignores physical pain, and tramples on his non-spiritual passions. Science is the language of the Intellect, Literature of the Soul; and Poetry, the highest expression of Literature, does for language, and sometimes for life, what the Soul does for the body, and what this glorious Italian sun does for mountain and plain: it spiritualises matter. Let me add, lest I should

seem too partial to the particular art I practise so imperfectly, that this is true of all imaginative Art; and, far from fearing lest Science should sap and supersede it, I trust and believe that Art will ever remain its complement, and, where necessary, its corrective.'

'Do you consider Italians,' asked Lamia, 'artistic or scientific, material or spiritual?'

'They are both, surely,' he replied. 'But, if we took the modern Florentine as the Italian type, I fear we would have to reply they are rather too prone to worship material science. The artistic faculty in them seems almost extinct, save for purposes of imitation; and, even when they imitate the art of the past, they do so without any discrimination between the good and the bad. But in railways, telegraphs, telephones, tramways, they take inexhaustible delight. They have disfigured much of Florence, and most of Rome, in their determination not to lag behind in the general march of what is termed material progress.'

'Is it not,' suggested Veronica, 'that they are essentially a practical race? When the world first took to commerce, the Florentines became great merchants and great bankers. When Popes and Princes posed as patrons of architecture, sculpture

and painting, they produced palaces, statues, and pictures.'

'Just so,' said Lamia; 'and now that the whole world has taken to travelling, Representative Institutions, and Music Halls, they have Circular Tours and a popular Parliament, both of which they work exceedingly badly, and a *Caffè Savonarola Spettacolo Diverso*, a piece of profanation for which I confess I should like to smack them.'

'There is a good deal of vulgarity,' I ventured to plead, 'in modern life, and in compliance with the theory you have all been pressing, they are vulgar accordingly. But would it not be more indulgent, and equally true, to say that Italy is the one country, and the Italians are the one race, whose vitality is inexhaustible? They have been well before the world, if you will pardon that expression, for more than two thousand five hundred years; and, during all that period, they have never altogether dropped out of sight. Neither do they now appear in the least disposed to retire into private life, or to preserve their ruins, however much some of us would like them to do so, for the satisfaction of our romantic feelings. Who would have believed, asked Saint Jerome fifteen hundred years ago, that Rome

would ever be sunk so low that, at the very seat of its Empire, it would be reduced to fight, not for glory, but for self-preservation. Yet what do we see to-day? Rome, not only safe against foreign assault, but, with the aid of railways and Maxim guns, meditating new triumphs and new glories.'

'That,' said the Poet, and I felt much flattered by his approval, 'is the more generous, and therefore the more just way of putting it. The Italians have a great Past, which they refuse to forget. It still continues to animate their ambition, and forbids them to rest satisfied with that *dolce far niente* with which they once were reproached. When the period of the Renaissance came to an end, Italy might have seemed to say, in the words of Nero, *Qualis artifex pereo*, and to perish most artistically. But Italy was *not* dead, as she has shown so clearly during the last thirty years. One's only regret is that the existing type of national greatness is so costly, that Italians have to pay a desperately heavy price for refusing to exist without it.'

'People,' said Lamia, 'frequently complain of the excessive loads Italian carters expect their horses and their mules to draw. But the whole of

Italy seems to me to be suffering from the same infliction.'

'I fear,' observed Veronica, 'there is much truth in what you say. Only yesterday I remonstrated with the driver of the carriage I had hired to bring me back to the Villa, because his horse seemed in a shockingly poor condition. His answer was, "*Campa come me*,—he fares as I do. When I have plenty, he has plenty. When I have little, there is little for him also. When there are more *forestieri*, he will have more oats."'

'Let us have a carriage apiece every afternoon,' said Lamia, 'and do what we all shall hate, drive round and round the *Cascine* from five to seven. Only, in that case, I *must* have that new gown.'

. . . . . .

'A firefly! A firefly!'

It was Veronica, invariably the most observant of us, whose voice called to us to welcome the fairy visitor, whose arrival is as delightful and momentous an event in Italy as the wing of the first swallow, the call of the first cuckoo, or the note of the first nightingale, in England. We were all on the alert in a moment, calling in return:

'Where? Where?'

It was a single, solitary firefly, for one may say of fireflies as of primroses :

> First you come by ones and ones,
> Lastly in battalions,

and it moved and twinkled in the deepening twilight, among the olive-trees, a miniature and terrestrial planet, having no fixed orbit. I need scarcely say that this was some days before *Pasqua delle Rose*, though Whitsuntide happened to be an early one ; and, the following night, we saw three, and, the night after, seven. Then, for May can be capricious in Tuscany as elsewhere, the weather was not propitious for them. But, by the time the moon was nearly at full, they were plenteous as stars in the Milky Way ; and while they flitted and glistened among the darkening leaves, the nightingales rejoiced and enlivened each other with the song that an ancient story and inherited association have transformed for us into a strain of imaginary sadness. Life offers no more enchanting combination of sensations than fall to one's lot on a warm Italian night in May, when moonlight, fireflies, and nightingales weave their concerted charm ; and, night after night, we repaired to the same antique marble seat, where

we liked to think Lorenzo and his associates had often sat, in front of the same dark silent cypresses, and drank in the same sweet, grave, harmonious delights. Perhaps you think us a company of selfish Hedonists, wholly given up to pleasurable sensations, poor weak copies of our Pagan Renaissance predecessors on the self-same spot? Whether that be true or not of some of us, I will not undertake to say. But certainly it is not true of Veronica, nor yet, I think, of Lamia. Indeed, speaking generally, I think one ought to entertain one's friends with a record of one's happiness rather than with a recital of one's woes; but it does not follow, does it, that there is no pathetic minor in one's life because one is not always sounding it? Indeed, amid all the enchantments of that Italian season when Spring and Summer are indistinguishable, we had been conscious of the shadow of pain which is cast by the surely approaching extinction of a young life in one's own immediate precincts; and the shadow was all the darker because the season was so bright. Ilaria, the youngest and comeliest of the daughters of our *contadini*, whose acquaintance you perhaps remember our first making, had, we were assured, till within a twelvemonth ago, more than justified

her pretty name by the joyousness of her ways. But there was a canker in the bud, which thus was destined never to open fully to the meridian of life; and, shortly after our arrival, her figure was no longer seen among the olives, or her voice heard among the vines. Veronica was much troubled by the utter lack of creature comforts in the spacious *casa colonica*, or farmhouse, where Ilaria was patiently awaiting the end, though in reality their absence was only part of that rudimentary simplicity of existence which is universal among a people untainted by Northern ideas of luxury. She and Lamia were unremitting in their visits, their nursing, and their solicitude. But these proved unavailing; and *Pasqua delle Rose* had to spare some of its luxuriant blooms for the grave of poor Ilaria. In the simple rustic household where she had left a vacant place, we liked to think that, in the daytime at least, the continual demands of Nature, in her busiest and most growing season, on the energy and co-operation of Man, diverted their thoughts somewhat from the missing figure; but, when we met and wished them good-day in the *podere*, tying the vines, training the *pomi-d'oro*, or cutting the sweet green fodder, that smile of which I once spoke as invariably accompanying

their salutations for awhile vanished from their faces, and at nightfall we knew they were brought into undistracted consciousness of their bereavement. We grieved for them, and felt, moreover, a separate grief of our own; and neither the luminous May moon, nor the fairy-flitting fireflies, nor the silvery fluting of the nightingale, could wean us from the gravity of our thoughts. Even the purest and most generous sympathy borrows something of its tenderness, I suppose, from the knowledge that we are one and all subject to the dispensation of grief, and that those who console to-day may themselves need to be consoled to-morrow; and this is peculiarly so with the advent of the shadow of death, from which not even the strongest nor the most sanguine can hope to escape. Thus, without saying it, we were all, I suspect, musing on our common mortality, and thinking how the continuance of the deepest and dearest of our joys depends on the favour and forbearance of Heaven.

But the Poet has a theory, which we have all more or less adopted, and which he generally expresses by the words, 'Cheerfulness is the most serviceable form of human charity'; and he never, if he can prevent it, permits us to linger over-long

in the fruitless gloom of sentimental sorrow. I think that was why, on the fourth evening after we had strewn the roses on Ilaria's grave, he recited to us, uninvited,—an unusual thing with him,—the following consolatory lines :—

WHEN I AM GONE

When I am gone, I pray you shed
No tears upon the grassy bed
Where that which you have loved is laid
Under the wind-warped yew-tree's shade.
And let no sombre pomp prepare
My unreturning journey there,
Nor wailing words nor dirges deep
Disturb the quiet of my sleep ;
But tender maidens, robed in white,
Who have not yet forgotten quite
The love I sought, the love I gave,
Be the sole mourners round my grave.
And neither then, nor after, raise
The bust of pride, the slab of praise,
To him who, having sinned and striven,
Now only asks to be forgiven,
That he is gone.

When I am gone, you must not deem
That I am severed, as I seem,
From all that still enchains you here,
Throughout the long revolving year.

When, as to Winter's barren shore
The tides of Spring return once more,
And, wakened by their flashing showers,
The woodland foams afresh with flowers,
You sally forth and ramble wide,
I shall walk silent at your side,
Shall watch your mirth, shall catch your smile,
Shall wander with you all the while,
And, as in many a bygone Spring,
Hear cuckoo call and ousel sing.
And, when you homeward wend, along
A land all blithe with bleat and song,
Where lambs that skip and larks that soar
Make this old world seem young once more,
And with the wildwood flowers that fill
Your April laps deck shelf and sill,
I shall be there to guide your hand,
And you will surely understand
I am not gone.

When Summer leans on Autumn's arm,
And warm round grange and red-roofed farm
Is piled the wain and thatched the stack,
And swallows troop and fieldfares pack ;
When round rough trunk and knotted root
Lies thick the freshly-fallen fruit,
And 'mong the orchard aisles you muse
On what we gain, on what we lose,
Now vernal cares no more annoy,
And wisdom takes the place of joy,
I shall be there, as in past years,

To share your steps, to dry your tears,
To note how Autumn days have brought
Feelings mature and mellow thought,
The fruitful grief for others' smart,
The ripeness of a human heart.
And, when the winds wax rude and loud,
And Winter weaves the stark year's shroud,
As round the flickering household blaze
You sit and talk of vanished days,
Of parent, friend, no longer nigh,
And loves that in the churchyard lie,
And lips grow weak, and lids grow wet,
Then, then, I shall be with you yet,
Though I seem gone.

. . . . .

As the time drew nearer and nearer for leaving the Tuscan home where we had been so happy, Veronica began to manifest a certain solicitude, in consequence of our leisurely and unsystematic ways, lest we should have omitted to make Lamia acquainted with some cloister or bas-relief, some bit of quaint street architecture, or some hill-side sanctuary, ignorance whereof might expose her to the reproach of a want of intelligent curiosity. But we found the omissions were few and unimportant, and this left us all the more free, during the now brief and regretful remainder of our sojourn, to pay farewell visits to the frescoes

and altar-pieces, the monuments and statues, that had most engaged her affections. Where Giotto worked, where Savonarola preached, where Frà Angelico painted and prayed, where Michelangelo fought, where Dante sate, where Donatello slept, in death as in life not severed from his beloved Medicean patron, these and kindred spots had to be seen just once more. When one quits a place where one has been residing for some little time, one says good-bye to one's friends; and these were, one and all, very dear friends to us, and we could not but take of them affectionate farewell. The *Luca della Robbia* in the *Ospedale degli Innocenti*, the Perugino in the *Maddalena dei Pazzi*, the Fountain by Verrocchio in the cortile of the *Palazzo Vecchio*, the recumbent Bishop in *San Miniato*, the Mino da Fiesole in the *Badia*, the bronze David in the *Bargello*;—but, unless I have a care, I shall fall into the fault I have been trying to avoid, of troubling you with a catalogue of familiar names. There were favourite spots, too, to drive to once again, happily too numerous to cite, and too lovely for any one to be so foolish as to attempt to describe. Exception, however, shall be made of one of these, for I fancy it is but little known, and therefore has not become hackneyed.

Accident made us acquainted with it, and design had often and often taken us there again. It was in a *podere* some two miles or so outside the Porta San Niccolò, whence, over a wall lined with irises, one looks down the river immediately in front of one straight away to Florence, but sees nothing there save, through the feathery foliage of distant poplars, the cupola of the Duomo, Giotto's campanile, and the Tower of the Palazzo Vecchio. Beyond, far beyond, are visible, on propitious days, the majestic peaks of the Carrara Mountains, and, a little farther towards the north, the snowy summits of the Apennines above Pistoia. It was a place that fascinated us, and we returned to it again and again. One evening, when the light was even exceptionally beautiful, but the air a little chill, and we had therefore, for Lamia's sake, to curtail our enjoyment of it, I remember her exclaiming:

'O, do let us stay. Even if it were deadly, it would be worth dying for. It may never be so beautiful again.'

That expresses a feeling which, I think, one often has in Italy. It is the intense beauty of certain moments, certain views, certain sunsets, that makes one declare one never before has seen anything so lovely, and dread lest on such loveli-

OUR TUSCAN GARDEN

ness one never more may gaze. A foolish fear; for to-morrow renews the radiance and raptures of to-day.

But the closing hours of the now lengthening days were always spent in the *loggia*, the garden, or the *podere* of our Villa; and Veronica, who, so English at home, was here the most Italian of us all, would, whenever the weather permitted, arrange for us to have our evening meal *al fresco*, in the society of the roses and the nightingales. Lamia had, as you may suppose, picked up many a Tuscan *stornello* and *canzone*, and would sing them to us, to the accompaniment of her guitar; and, between song and song, discourse would run on all the beauty and the wonders we had seen that day.

'What is it,' said Lamia, 'that, more than anything else, constitutes the charm of Italy?'

'Ancientness,' said the Poet, 'and an ancientness that never grows old. For Italy, notwithstanding its centuries of history, art, warfare, misfortune, remains perennially young. More than once, the rash have said, "Italy is dead." Italy never dies. She has the gift of perpetual life; but, with all her indestructible freshness, she carries about her the dignity of bygone times and the

majesty of tradition. The new is always more or less vulgar. Refinement is the work of time. You remember Aristotle's definition of Aristocracy, Ancient riches. Italy has ancient riches, the riches of law, religion, poetry, and the arts, long established, and she has therefore what is most precious in aristocracy. She has ancient speech and ancient manners. Her mountains are necessarily ancient, the Soracte of Horace, the Alps of Hannibal. But her plains and valleys are equally so, for she has an ancient agriculture. We are sitting at this moment surrounded by a rural cultivation that is described with absolute accuracy in the *Georgics*, and again by Politian in his *Rusticus*, written on this very spot, and that has not changed since the days of Cincinnatus. Listen to that fellow singing among the olives. Virgil has described him,—*Canit fundator ad auras*,—and might be his contemporary. It is this far-backness, if I may coin a word to express my meaning, that sheds a glamour over everything in Italy, a far-backness, however, that endures and persists, that is with us and around us, and compels us to bend with reverence before it, as we must ever do before the parent Past we still have with us. In proportion as Italy parts with its Past, Italy will lose its

charm. The temptation to do so in this age is great, and I fear it is not being sufficiently resisted.

'Dear Poet,' said Lamia, 'will you forgive me if I object that I have sometimes been told, though I am sure most inaccurately, that I, for instance, am charming; and yet I am not ancient.'

'Dear Lamia,' he replied, 'you are very ancient, and are under deep obligation to ancestors you never saw, and probably never heard of; and I hope you will be yet more charming for your visit to this old and captivating land. For my part, I always seem to miss something in people who have not fallen under its spell. You have succumbed to it entirely. I shall never weary, and I hope I shall never weary you, in extolling the power of the Past. Would the descant of those nightingales have the same charm for us, if they had not been singing thus for myriads of Mays? Spring is so irresistibly charming because it recalls and renews the Aprils that are gone. Time consecrates and confirms. The deeper our roots, the loftier our thoughts, and the sounder our hearts. I remember a great poet of this age saying to me that he could not see that, as some one had affirmed, he in his writings so much resembled Keats. "You are Keats's own child," I replied,

"and are of noble parentage." But indeed every great poet is the lineal descendant of every other great poet. At any given moment, what exercises most influence is, not the present, but the Past. I ventured, the other day, to observe that there are only two sorts of people, the noble and the ignoble. Dear Lamia, let us try to belong to the noble, since every one may be a member of that untitled aristocracy; so that, when we ourselves are, as some of us are gradually becoming, portions of the Past, we may influence beneficently an unborn Future.'

'There never was anything more untrue,' said Lamia, who was quick to surmise the more personal meaning that underlay those closing words, 'than the saying "*On n'est jeune qu'une fois.*" I have been old several times; but I always get young again.'

'And you will do so very often, I dare say, for many years to come. Moreover, I like to think there is the youth of one's youth, the youth of one's manhood, and, finally, the youth of one's old age. But, when one has reached this last, man's capacity for rejuvenescence is exhausted.'

Lamia rose from her seat, placed herself close beside him, and taking his hand, replied:

'Dear Poet, even in my youngest moments, compared with you I am in my dotage.' And I would at that moment have been any age you will, to be treated thus tenderly.

We made many expeditions of which I have not told you, just as we visited, again and again, churches, palaces, and dismantled monasteries I have not named. But Lamia particularly wished to see a Convent,—a Convent, that is to say, in the Italian signification, of monks, not disestablished, but allowed still to survive, with a certain number of its inmates, as a national monument. She had heard me speak of the attractive hospitality I had enjoyed in them in days gone by; and we selected for our monastic excursion a Convent in the Apennines not too remote from Florence, and the drive to which would take us through Gavinana, a spot none of us had ever visited. Does the word Gavinana suggest anything to you? Probably not; yet it was there that the liberties of Florence received their final extinction. Indeed I fancy that, of the thousands of people who nowadays visit the Tuscan Capital, many are unaware that, in the earlier part of the sixteenth century, it underwent a Siege whose incidents strongly resemble many that occurred during the

siege of another Capital nearly thirty years ago. Only Florence is much more beautiful than Paris, and less suggestive of the horrors of war. Yet the Siege of Florence lasted ten months, or more than twice as long as that of Paris ; its inhabitants underwent far greater hardships, and displayed much greater heroism. We might have been a little sceptical on those points had Florentine historians been our only authority for them. But the copious and impartial Reports of the Venetian Ambassadors who were in the Fair City at the time render doubt impossible, and establish the courage, pertinacity, and patience of the besieged against Emperor and Pope. All the villas within a certain radius of Florence were rased to the ground, lest they should furnish help and corn to the besiegers ; and all its silver plate, both sacred and profane, was melted down to replenish the coffers of the Republic. It is the noblest, perhaps it is the one perfectly noble, incident in the story of Florence ; and I sometimes have thought, and the Poet agrees with me, that Francesco Ferruccio, whose statue is among that series of famous Florentines outside the Uffizi, is its most heroic and effective figure. He would in all probability have saved Florence, had the timidity of some of his fellow-countrymen, and the treachery

of others, allowed him ; for he proposed to create a diversion by marching on Rome, and menacing it with another sack such as had recently taken place under the Constable Bourbon. His project was overruled, and he died fighting in the piazza at Gavinana ; his only consolation, in his last moments, being that the Leader of the Imperial Army, the Prince of Orange, was also slain. 'The ill-omened spot,' says the historian of the Commonwealth of Florence, 'lies within sight of the traveller as he passes, about a mile to the right of it, on his way from Pistoia to Modena. And not a peasant of those mountains, though ignorant as his yoke of dove-coloured oxen of all the history of his country from that day to this, not a goat-herd tending his flock by the roadside, not a grimy muleteer bringing down his string of charcoal-laden beasts from the forests of the Upper Apennine, will be unable to point out to the stranger the field on which, nearly four hundred years ago, Tuscan liberty was fought for and lost.'

Drinking our coffee, for which we paid an incredibly small sum, under the plane trees of the square where Ferruccio and Florence fell, we again discoursed on the arbitrary hazards of Time that made the City justly called Fair, and to which one

is often disposed to apply what Ovid represents Helen as saying to her Grecian paramour :—

> 'Apta magis Veneri quam sunt tua corpora Marti :
> Bella gerant alii ; tu, Paris, semper ama,'

a place of arms, a city woeful and intrepid, the champion of freedom against Sceptre and Tiara.

'Surely,' said Lamia, 'Dante would have forgiven Florence could he have lived to see that day. The times were grim, and the deeds austere enough even for one "who had seen Hell." Would you not rather,' she continued, turning to the Poet, 'have it said of you that you had seen Heaven?'

'Remember,' said Veronica, 'Dante saw both.'

The twilight was deepening into dusk before we reached the Convent whither we were bound, for our driver had taken a wrong turning during the last few miles of our journey ; and Lamia was quick to note, as characteristic of Italy, that, when inquiry put us on the right one, the directions given were, not as in England, according to sign-posts, but to little tabernacles or shrines at the parting of the ways: now of the Annunciation, now of Saint Agatha or Saint Barbara, now of Saint Francis of Assisi receiving the Stigmata. I am

afraid her curiosity was more piqued than satisfied when we reached our bourne ; for, though we were most piously welcomed, Veronica and she were not allowed to violate that portion of the Convent which is defended from female gaze by the word *Clausura ;* and she not unnaturally, though quite inaccurately, imagined that she was not shown what was most worth seeing. The Poet and I were allotted sleeping-cells within the Monastery, but our companions, of course, had to pass the night in the *Foresteria*, or strangers' quarter, outside, in charge of a lay-brother, and it was there we all had our truly ascetic supper. But the guests of Sallust never enjoyed one more ; for our host, the Prior, was an ideal monk, majestic yet saintly of aspect, with long flowing beard, silky and snowy, measured manners, and paternally caressing voice. The Rules of his Order forbid any instrumental accompaniment either at Mass or the other Sacred Offices of the twenty-four hours; but he had always loved music for its own sake, and he had made for himself a primitive sort of spinette, on which he said he would play to us, for our further entertainment, when the lay-brother who was waiting on us had retired, and all the Confraternity were in their first deep sleep. The performance,

like the instrument, was touching in its simplicity; and Veronica, wishing to make him some return, said that Lamia, too, was fond of music, and would, she was quite sure, sing to him if he cared to hear her. Even in the *Foresteria*, I fear, there was a touch of the profane in the suggestion; but he evidently could not resist the temptation thus presented to him, and begged Lamia to sing, but with not too loud and penetrating a voice. She at once broke into the wild and melancholy chant the Italian recruits used to sing in the days of Napoleon, when they were dragged from their homes to face the snows of Russia:—

> 'Partir, partir bisogna,
> Dove commanderà il mio Sovrano.'

But Lamia got no further than those two lines; for our venerable host suddenly exclaimed, the colour mounting to his face, and the tears brimming in his eyes:

'Stop! stop! *Mi monta la fantasia.*' And he went on to tell us how he had not heard that strain for five-and-forty years, and that it used to be sung by one whose caprice had caused him to abandon the world and assume the habit of Saint Bruno.

On our journey homeward, the following morning, Lamia asked :

'How would you translate the words the dear old Prior used last night, *Mi monta la fantasia?*'

'They are not easily rendered into another tongue,' said Veronica, 'for they mean so much in the original. But when he said, "the fantasy mounts and seizes hold of me," he doubtless meant that your voice suddenly made him feel all he had felt five-and-forty years ago.'

'O, how delightful!' said Lamia. 'Then I forced the *Clausura*, after all.'

'It is a pity,' said Veronica, whose sane nature and active temperament render her a little intolerant of monasticism in any form, 'that you could not break it down altogether, and so make an end of it.'

'And yet,' said the Poet, who has rather more indulgence for the weaknesses of human nature, perhaps because he shares them more, 'I doubt if we have done with the motives, many and various, that once engendered and still foster monasticism. The strong, the valiant, the sensible, require no shelter from the rough usage of the world. But, as in the days of savage militarism, so in these of an almost equally pitiless industrialism, terror,

timidity, indolence, mysticism, love of meditation, longing for silence, and a certain passive piety, make men fly the market-place for the cloister. When Dante, exiled from Florence, appeared at the Convent in the Apennines, and was asked by the monks who he might be, did he not answer, "One who is in quest of peace"? There is no second Dante, but there are many exiles in this modern world, and I fear their number every day increases. As the struggle for existence waxes fiercer and fiercer, I think I hear them, too, exclaiming, *Dona nobis pacem.*'

'Listening first to Veronica,' said Lamia, 'and then to you, I am forced to the conclusion that many things are intolerable which we cannot do without. Yet I confess a Convent of Nuns seems more natural than a Confraternity of Monks.'

'More natural, perhaps,' said the Poet, 'but hardly so necessary. For, even in the very heart of the world, every good woman is more or less nunlike, by virtue of her purity, her reserve——'

'And, I suppose,' interrupted Lamia, 'her obedience?'

Nothing disconcerted, he re-echoed the words: 'And her obedience.'

'Have you not, dear,' asked Veronica, 'confuted

THROUGH THE OLIVES, FLORENCE

yourself by anticipation? It was a man, not a woman, was it not, that took leave of the Prior, who would fain have detained him, with the words—

'Father, farewell! Be not distressed,
And take my vow, ere I depart,
To found a Convent in my breast,
And keep a cloister in my heart.'

'One is constantly confuting oneself,' he replied.

'How should it be otherwise?' said Lamia. 'Verse being the expression, not of the convictions, but of the emotions, poets cannot be taxed with inconsistency, though they contradict themselves a thousand times.'

'Thank you, dear Lamia,' he said. 'You are the most ingenious of apologists. If ever I have to defend myself, you shall be my Portia.'

. . . . .

But the last day, the last night, and then the very morning of departure at length arrived, when Florence, with its gorgeous towers and cloud-capped palaces, was, for a time at least, to dissolve like the baseless fabric of a vision. Perfetta was in tears; Ippolito had a *mazzetto* of carnations for us all; the *contadini* desisted from their work to cluster in the garden in order to see us off

with many gracious words and expressions of hope that next year we should return; and the entire household manifested by melancholy smiles their sorrow at our going. Pasquale, the *cameriere*, had come into my room early that morning with a doleful face, and, in reply to a renewed inquiry whether we could not help him to find another place, assured me that he would not care to serve anybody else; and he launched into touching eulogies of Veronica's considerateness and universal capacity, of Lamia's irresistible charm, of the genius of the Poet,—*Il Gran Poeta*, he called him, though utterly ignorant, I need scarcely say, of the very language in which that retiring person writes,—and of the thousand-and-one virtues which, finally, he ascribed to myself. If you think that he was insincere, because he in some degree exaggerated, I can assure you that you are mistaken. He believed it all.

'No, no,' he said. '*Ringrazio tanto la sua signoria*, but I could not serve any one else. *Riprenderò il mio antico mestiere*' (I will return to my old calling).

'And what may that be?' I asked.

'Do you not know?' he said. '*Io son comico*' (I am an actor).

The dear people we were leaving are all of them so much more or less histrionic, that Pasquale's occasionally fine gestures had never struck me as singular or exceptional.

'*Sì, Signore, son comico io*,' he went on, 'I am an actor, and have played at Lucca, at Fiesole, at Pisa, yes and at Siena. Once I was in the same cast with the stupendous tragedian, Salvini.'

'Yes, a great actor, indeed,' I said. 'I once saw him in an Italian version of our English drama *Othello*.'

He was in his early morning dress, wearing no coat nor jacket, and having in his turned-up white apron my boot-trees, which he was just about to pack. But he drew himself up with much dignity, and, with the one disengaged hand suiting the action to the word, he said :

'I, too, have played the part of Otello.' And, without more ado, he recited, in his sonorous language, the lines :

> Farewell the tranquil mind ! farewell content !
> Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars ;
> That make ambition virtue ! O, farewell !

And the earnestness with which he recited that pathetic passage completely submerged the sense of humour that was beginning to rise in me.

As we entered Florence, so did we quit it, leisurely, and without the disenchanting scenes of a modern railway station. We were to drive across the Apennines to Bologna, and, as we reached the last flower-stall near the Gate that looks thitherward, Lamia expressed a wish for one more flower. It was a lovely rose, the only one on a plant that occupied among the others the place of honour.

'It is a pity to spoil the plant,' said the woman, who was well known to us, for we had often halted to make purchases from her. 'Will not another serve equally well?'

You will easily surmise Lamia's reply. No rose in the world but that one would have satisfied her desire.

'*Come vuole*,' said the woman ('be it as you wish'), and she severed the fair flower from its stalk.

'How much is it?' I asked, eagerly availing myself of the opportunity to make dear Lamia a parting gift from the City of Flowers.

'Don't trouble about it,' said the woman, 'you can pay some other time.'

'But there will be no other time,' said Lamia, 'for we are going away for good and all.'

'*Dunque, non si paga. Addio, e buon viaggio!*

was the reply. ('In that case, you must not pay at all. Happy be your journey! Good-bye!')

. . . . .

If people love their home, there is no wrong time for coming back to it; and, were it not for the delight of returning, I doubt if it would be wise, save under compulsion, ever to leave it. Tacitus asks, Who would quit Italy for Germany, were it not that Germany is his own country? Over English folk, at all worthy of their great descent, the name of England exercises a more enthralling spell even than that of Italy; and the Garden that I love is all the dearer to me because it is thoroughly English. But the moment for returning to it fell out most felicitously; and, gazing on the scene that awaited us, we were instantly weaned from all regret even for the sky and sunshine of Tuscany. Under the broad-trunked, wide-spreading Oak,—Veronica has christened this particular plot of ground the Oak Parlour,—Five O'Clock Tea was waiting for us, and once more we looked on one of those Urns which, I am told, have made the owner's name a household word in many kindly hearts. I need not say again how happy we had been in our Tuscan villa, and I verily believe that Veronica would contrive to make us comfortable in the

desert of Sahara. But it is idle to pretend that all we mean by the word 'Home' is to be had save in this, our own island; and there is all the difference in the world between Perfetta and the tearful *cameriere* who, I suppose, has now returned to his *antico mestiere*, and is smothering Desdemona before some provincial Tuscan audience, and the Northern handmaidens who, moulded by the genius of Veronica, perform with noiseless celerity every office that can minister to the grace of existence. Do not think me material if I say that that first Five O'Clock Tea in the Oak Parlour after our return was an event in our life; for its charm was compounded of many elements, into which entered the abiding influence of unluxurious domestic refinement. The green antiquity of the oak, the smooth verdure of the lawn, unattainable, I fear, by the services of a shepherd lass and her flock of nibbling sheep, the luxuriance and variety of the flowers, the view, under the oaken branches, of the Manor-House, white with roses from ground to gable, the snowy face of the tablecloth, the glow of the burnished urn, the brightness, the spotlessness, the seemliness of everything, all contributed to the welcome that attended us, and to the pleasure we received from it.

But something more awaited us than the renewal of old delights. Shortly before we started for our six months' absence, we had decided, after much deliberation, to add, in a modest way, to the home that we had a thousand times declared, in our optimistic fashion, to be already ample for our needs; and the result was now before us. You may easily imagine our anxiety to discern if the decision had been wise or the reverse; for, though we had gone into the plan with a most competent architect to the utmost detail, and though Veronica had brought her practical and tasteful mind to bear upon window and overmantel, hinge and door-plate, moulding and lining-paper, there is always a danger lest instructions should have been misunderstood or imperfectly carried out, or that the instructions themselves were wholly or in part a mistake. We were prepared to be pleased, but also to criticise; but for fault-finding there was, in truth, no possible room. Animated by reverence for what already existed, we had bound architect and builder to certain well-defined lines and curves, prohibiting externally all originality save what is perhaps the best kind of it in these days, pious and humble reproduction of what is already recognised as

beautiful. A room, which was originally spoken of as a billiard-room, and which for a brief while retained that designation, though all idea of having a billiard-table in it had been promptly abandoned, and which now is known as the Morning Room, because, as Lamia says, we nearly always sit there of an evening, a new boudoir for Veronica, who has at last a refuge of her own worthy of her beneficent labours, three new sleeping-chambers, and another staircase, composed the new quarter. And will you believe it?—it was already furnished; Veronica having made due preparations and given minute instructions for this end partly before our departure, and partly during our absence. Now, did she triumph over us in the matter of those various purchases in Florence that used to move our ignorant mirth; for everything she had acquired had been sent home in time to be unpacked and placed in the room and the position allotted to it. Thus, at every turn, we were reminded of the Fair City and the bewitching land we had so lately left, and of which, not to be ungrateful, we still talked affectionately even in the hours of our home-coming.

But Veronica had no monopoly of success in the swift adornment of our new wing. I, too,

had a little triumph of my own, but, I need scarcely say, out-of-doors. I do not often sing my own praises, do I, preferring to extol the Poet and Veronica, who are more deserving of eulogy. But, on this occasion, I think I really did deserve the congratulations that were lavished on me. For, with a truly foreseeing mind, I had been growing on, to use a gardener's phrase, a certain number of climbing roses, clematis, jessamine, and other creepers, and had given the strictest injunctions that they were to be planted against the new building the very instant the masons had finished it, and were to be fostered and trained with constant and unremitting attention; and, as they were then already robust in growth and vigorous at the root, they were well on their way up the new wing on our arrival. A legend has since grown up that I did not leave England at all, but remained on the spot with barrow, trug, and trowel, and that, fast as the work-people laid a course of stone or brick, I planted a creeper. But, as a fact, it happened as I have said.

As for the garden, the garden that the too kindly sympathy of others permits one to say we all love, I can only say I wish the whole of Italy could have seen it. The Tea Roses, more numer-

ous and more beautiful than ever, seemed smilingly to say, 'Has Tuscany roses to show more fair?' Larkspurs, of every imaginable shade of blue, from azure to cerulean; lupines, white, purple, and yellow; foxgloves, snowy-white and without a freckle; seemed to challenge each other as to which would tower highest in the summer air. The Pæony Poppies, some purposely some accidentally sown, were a garden in themselves, fair but fugitive, yet making up by their number and infinite variety for the briefness of their existence. They were everywhere in the beds and borders, and, as it seemed, where they had chosen to be; there, by the right of supreme loveliness, and the Swan-neck Poppies, the Caucasian, and the Victoria Cross, rocked more humbly beside them. No other plant of such supreme beauty has so solid a stem and such imposing foliage for so fragile a flower; and this it is, I think, which mainly constitutes its fresh charm. Every one now loves flowers, and I have no need to weary you with a catalogue of those in the Garden that I Love. But I doubt if there be any perennial plant of real beauty and value that will grow in our latitude which is not to be found there; and I can say with truth, of every bed and border, that you could not see the ground

LARKSPURS

for flowers. As for the winding turf walk, which perhaps you remember as the South Enclosure, it is not I who will say what it looked like when we returned. For one who has justly acquired honour, not only by the beauty of her own home, but by her charming pages concerning all that appertains to a garden, and who had visited it the day before our arrival, left a little line for Veronica, in which she generously said it was the loveliest she had ever seen. I should hesitate to repeat so flattering an opinion, were it not for some injustice to myself that followed. 'As for the winding turf walk and its glow of bloom and colour on either side,' said the kindly writer, 'nowhere, I am sure, is there anything like it; and only the Poet could have conceived it.' As if it was the Poet who had conceived it! It was I who,—but so it is in this unfair world, where everybody bows down before prestige. Lamia herself could not have been more partial or more unjust.

I made some observation of the kind to Veronica, imagining we were alone, and got for reply,—

'My dear, you will never understand women.'

'How is it possible,' I asked, a little nettled by the implied rebuke, 'when no two women are alike?'

'No *one* woman is alike,' said Lamia, suddenly emerging from a luxuriance of leaf and flower that had concealed her from view; and, though Veronica was there to disprove the universal application of her aphorism, I think she spoke from the very depths of her own inner consciousness.

Not even the novelty of the fresh wing, though we kept returning to it again and again in the course of that to us memorable evening, could keep us indoors. Lilac, hawthorn, and laburnum had of course flowered and faded, and the glory of the rhododendrons was fast passing away. But the air was fragrant with the newly-made but yet uncarted hay; the scent of the elder was wafted from the lane; the smell of sweet-briar, with its profusion of little pink rosebuds, was everywhere in the garden; and we kept stopping ever and again to inhale the penetrating perfume of the freshly-opened tassels of the lime. Longer and darker grew the shadows on the lawn, then gradually drew themselves in, and vanished. The Tea Roses, no longer languid from the heat of the long summer day, lifted their fair faces freshened with evening dew; the streaks of crimson that point the pathway of departed days gradually faded from the west, and the lingering love-song of the missel-thrush at

length came to end, absorbed into the general silence. It was twilight still, but a twilight slowly succumbing to the Midsummer night, if night it could be called to which the darkness never wholly came. Elsewhere, on shrub and sward the deepening dusk brought its beneficent tribute of abounding moisture; but, under the manifold foliage of the Oak, the ground retained the dryness of noon. Under its protecting canopy therefore, as many a time before, satisfied and silent we sate; till Lamia, moved by the influence of the hour, once again liberated her fresh young voice, and wedded to notes of almost austere simplicity the no less simple measure of this Vesper Hymn.

GOOD-NIGHT!

I

Good-night! Now dwindle wan and low
The embers of the afterglow,
And slowly over leaf and lawn
Is twilight's dewy curtain drawn.
The slouching vixen leaves her lair,
And, prowling, sniffs the tell-tale air.
The frogs croak louder in the dyke,
And all the trees seem dark alike:
The bee is drowsing in the comb,
The sharded beetle hath gone home:
Good-night!

II

Good-night! The hawk is in his nest,
And the last rook hath dropped to rest.
There is no hum, no chirp, no bleat,
No rustle in the meadow-sweet.
The woodbine, somewhere out of sight,
Sweetens the loneliness of night.
The Sister Stars, that once were seven,
Mourn for their missing mate in Heaven.
The poppy's fair frail petals close,
The lily yet more languid grows,
And dewy-dreamy droops the rose:
Good-night!

III

Good-night! Caressing and caressed,
The moist babe warms its mother's breast.
Silent are rustic loom and lathe;
The scythe lies quiet as the swathe;
The woodreeve blinks in covert shed,
The weary yokel is abed,
The covey warm beneath the wing,
And sleep enfoldeth everything.
Forsaken love, its last tear shed,
On the lone pillow lays its head,
And all our woes are respited:
Good-night!

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